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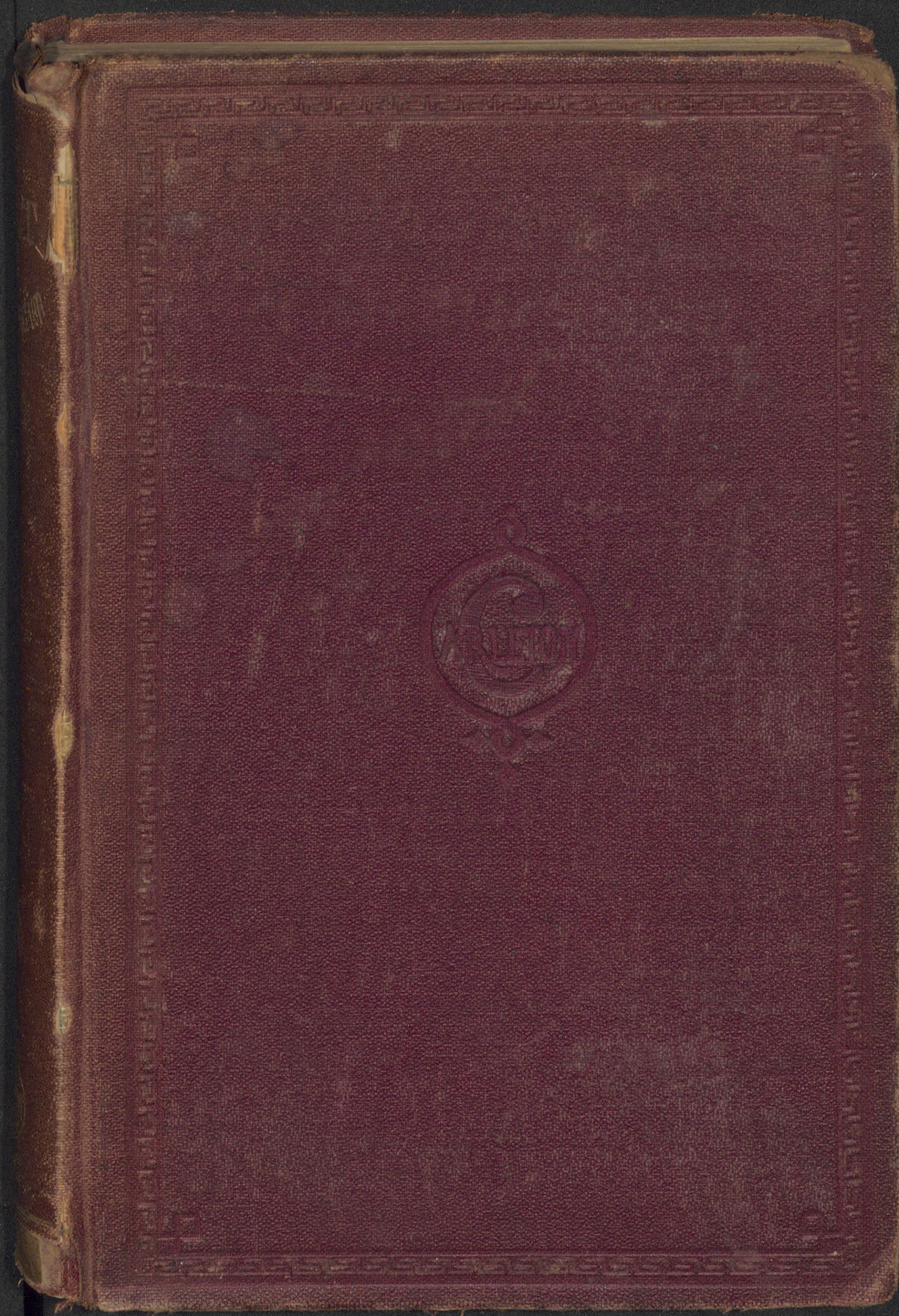
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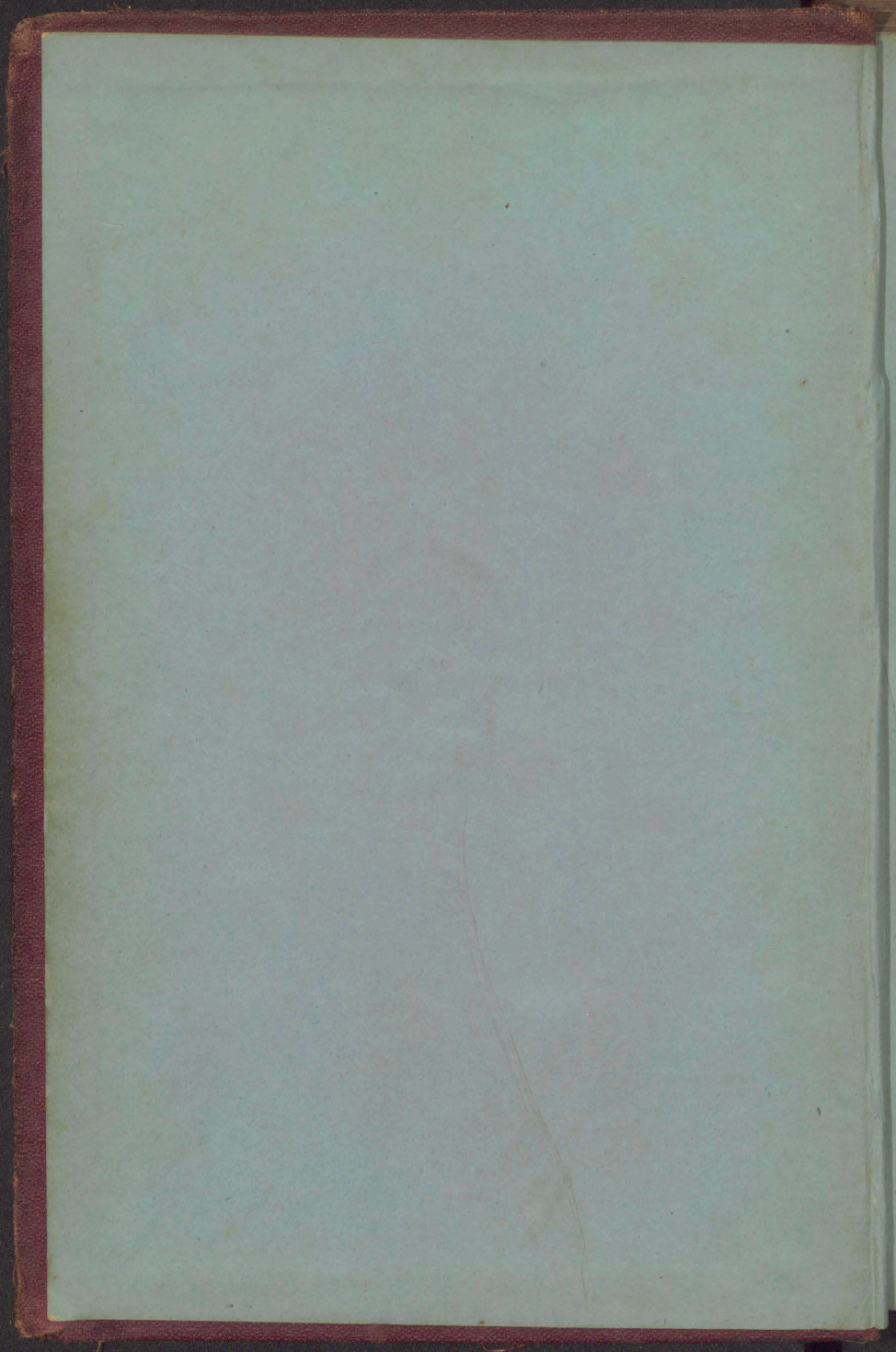
The Art of Conversation with Directions For Self Education (Part 1)

George W. Carleton

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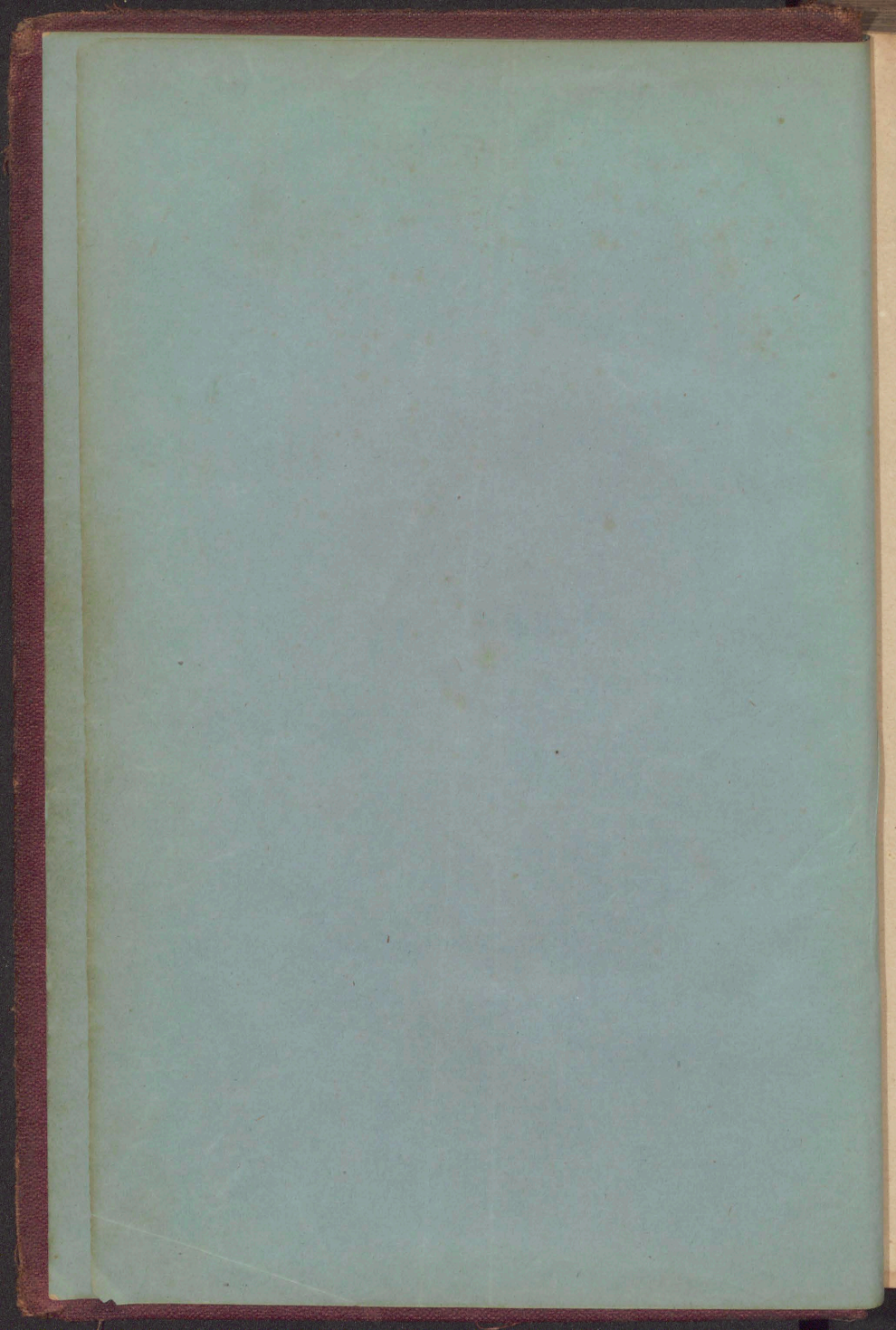




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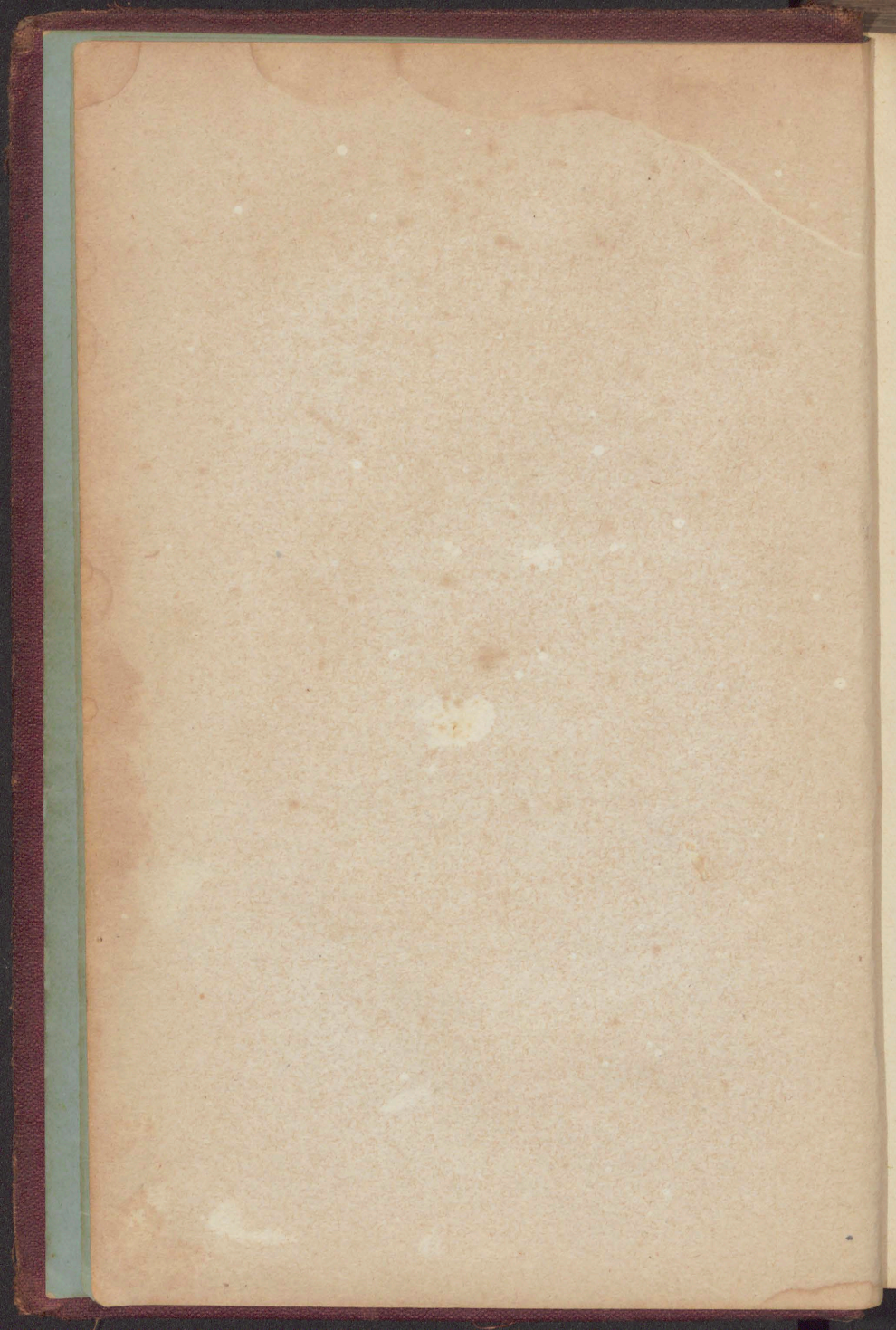
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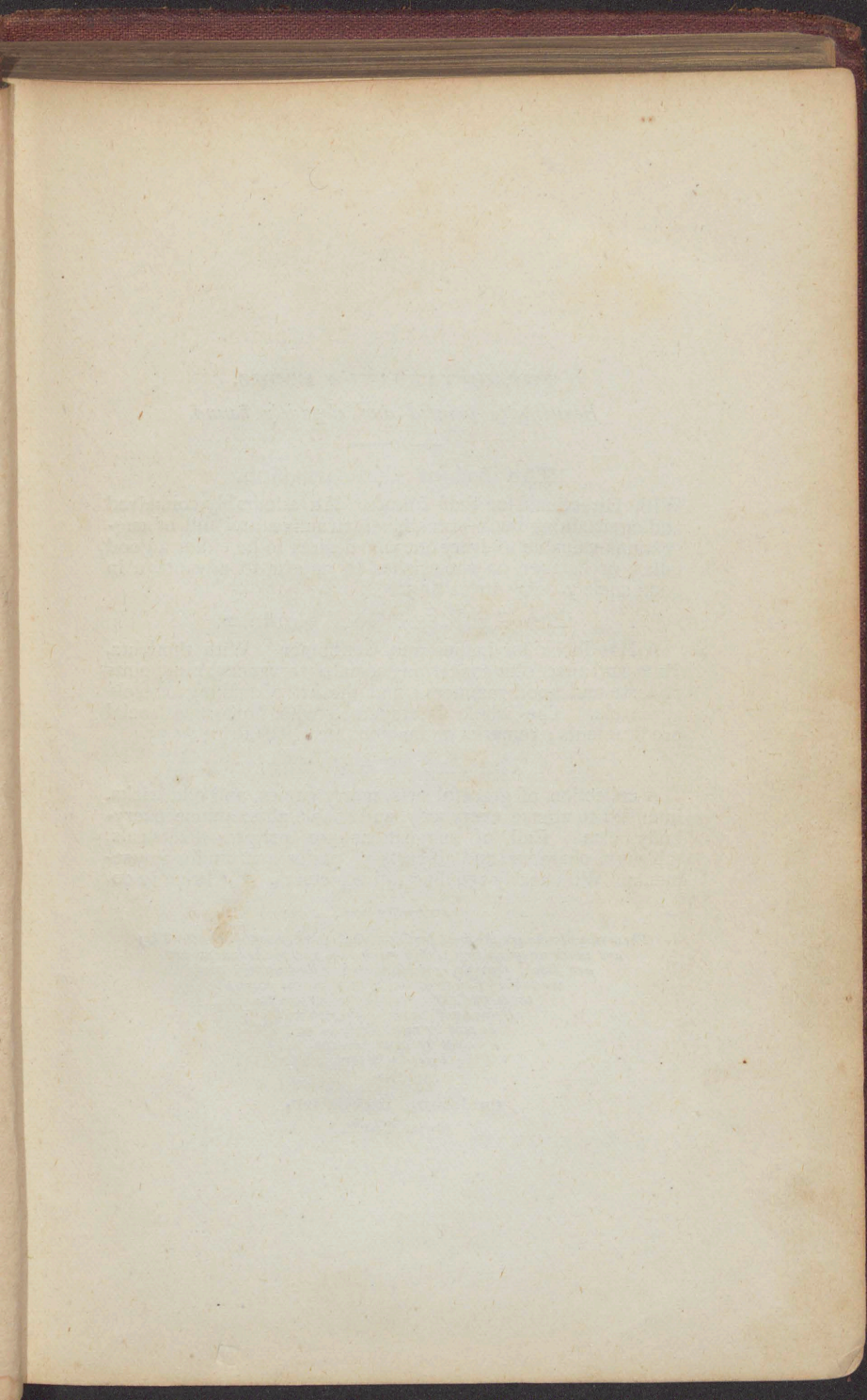


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THE
ART OF CONVERSATION,

WITH
DIRECTIONS FOR SELF EDUCATION



NEW YORK:
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CONTENTS.

Preface	Page 7
-------------------	-----------

INTRODUCTION.

Of Conversation in General.	15
-------------------------------------	----

THE ART OF CONVERSATION.

Chap.		
I.	Attention in Conversation.	24
II.	Of Inspiring Confidence in Conversation.	29
III.	Personal Appearance. — Dress. — Ornaments.	37
IV.	Of Satire, Sarcasm and Teasing.	40
V.	Of Censure and Fault-Finding.	46
VI.	Of Compliments.	49
VII.	Of Egotism in Conversation.	57
VIII.	Politeness—Its basis—Its Applications.	71
IX.	Of Stories, Anecdotes and Puns in Conversation.	81
X.	Of Questioning—Its Misapplication and its advantages in Conversation	90
XI.	Taking Liberties.—Impudence.—Staring.	93

Chap.		Page
XII.	Of Argument in Conversation.—Of Men who are “always in the right.”	98
XIII.	Of the Influence of women in Conversation.—Married Ladies.	104
XIV.	Of Disagreeable Subjects in Conversation.	111
XV.	The Paradox in Conversation.	114
XVI.	Of Selfishness in Trifles.—Small Sacrifices.	118
XVII.	Of Conversation at Dinner-Parties	124
XVIII.	Of Silent people.—Timidity—Its Cure.	130
XIX.	Of Correct Language in Conversation.	135

SELF EDUCATION.

XX.	Of acquiring General Knowledge.	145
XXI.	Of Self Instruction in Literary Composition or Writing.	149
XXII.	Of Reading.	156
XXIII.	Moral and Mental Philosophy.	165
XXIV.	Of Art in Conversation.—Æsthetics	167
XXV.	Of Studying Languages	174
XXVI.	Of Curious and Miscellaneous Knowledge.	180
XXVII.	Of Science.	184

APPENDIX.

XXVIII.	Of Vulgarisms in Conversation	199
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PREFACE.



T is often urged against works like the following, that they profess to teach what can only be acquired by practical experience.

Reflection over this objection induced me to write the ensuing pages. And having borne it in mind through every chapter, I trust I may be pardoned for dissenting from such a canon of criticism. Conversation is like chemistry, something which must of course *result* in actual practice, but it is as true of the one as of the other, that it is based on comprehensible facts which may be set forth in books.

The truth is, that this objection is a relic of the old school, which jealously restricted all familiarity with the elegant arts of life to a favored few, whose interest it was to create the impression that such arts were veiled by a

mystery never to be comprehended by the multitude. This impression was enforced by identifying good-breeding, accomplishments and grace, with innumerable frivolous laws of etiquette, and by making the whole depend on intimate acquaintance with the fleeting *mode* or fashion, which was however attainable in perfection only in a court circle. It is however worth remarking, that a very great proportion of this elegance of the old school "which no books can teach," was entirely derived from dancing masters and teachers of "style" — themselves members of that lower class of society above which their pupils, thanks to their efforts, were to be so mysteriously exalted.

There has been of late years a great change in the opinions of the world regarding etiquette and elegance, since the dancing master has been dethroned, and the master of ceremonies no longer takes precedence of the school-teacher, clergyman and editor. Social intercourse, even in royal circles, is every day being based more and more on the laws of common sense, of kindness and of respect for the innate dignity of every man, than on the accidents of rank, and on a conventional, Japanese-like etiquette. The laws which lend grace and a charm to life are, in other words, becoming more distinctly intelli

gible, and more capable of being defined as something real, even in a book.

Not only within the past fifty years, but actually during the present decade, have there been striking changes in the manners of gentlemen, and in the tone of conversation, as regards laying aside an affected and silly etiquette for the natural dictates of the heart, and for a social code which treats the poorest man as a gentleman, so long as he behaves like one. Republicanism is, in fact, becoming the law among the most highly cultivated, while the worn-out frippery of the old school is, oddly enough, cherished principally by the wealthy and ambitious vulgar.

That the spirit of the conversation of the present day is infinitely more capable of being presented in a book than was that of the old school will, I imagine, be denied by no one who is impartially familiar with both. And such readers will, I trust, give their sympathy to a very sincere effort which the author earnestly hopes will not be without effect in disseminating among the young men of America some knowledge of the refinements of social intercourse as based upon manliness, common sense, intellectual culture, and a kindly regard for the rights of

others, instead of the scraps of an artificial and shallow etiquette which is rapidly becoming a matter of ridicule.

I should state in connection with this subject, that an additional impulse to write this volume was given by examination of a number of current works on society, conversation and etiquette. The tone of nearly all seemed so singularly old fashioned, so frivolous and imitative of merely superficial "manners," that it was with real concern I learned that such books are sold annually in incredible numbers. That their effect must be to make silly fops, instead of brave-hearted and truly cultivated gentlemen, is apparent on every page. One very popular work tells its reader of "A little book entitled 'The Art of Tying the Cravat,' which is as indispensable to a gentleman as an ice at twelve o'clock." A very recent volume — and by far the most pretentious of them all — declares that our conduct in society should consist of "a happy medium between well-directed insolence," and "the subordinating our own vanity to the vanity of others." Another work of sober tone consists chiefly of hackneyed moral axioms, and tends to make the great law of social intercourse an anxious care to abstain from everything like amusement or cheerfulness — its hero of

a diary being a youth who regretted he had not worked hard on the Fourth of July! Another deals principally in such arts as retiring gracefully from a room, "which can only be done by an easy *side-step*, accompanied by a graceful bow" — a performance which the author declares is very difficult, and requires much private practice, but which is indispensable, "since *nothing* is so rude and *disgusting*, as to turn your back upon any one." The same writer, while urging the advantages of what he terms "female conversation," adds as a climax to the disasters which must result from neglecting such conversation, that should you do so, "you will certainly never learn *to dress*" — this *dressing*, be it observed, constituting a very important part of his manual of politeness.

I should be indeed sorry to refer in such a manner to the writings of others were they simply *harmless*; but such coxcomb's doctrines are not harmless, since they make great mischief, in common with all that pretends to teach young people that true culture is a matter of bows, expense, elaborate toilettes and grimaces; or on the other hand that it consists of sad austerity instead of genial kindness, intellectual culture, joyous appreciation of all that is merry and wise, and of life as it should be among either rich or poor.

The object of this book is therefore briefly as follows :

There is a strong tendency in the present age to base the laws of social intercourse upon a standard of dignity and of rights common to all, and to treat every one as a gentleman and an equal, so long as he behaves civilly. To do this, common sense teaches us that we must tacitly lay aside most of that *artificial manner* which a poor man, however courteous he may be by nature, cannot be expected to have learned. It is on this ground that I would establish the principles of conversation and of culture.

The reader will readily understand that I do not mean that a gentleman should at *any* time forget his natural ease, grace, or correct language. I refer simply to that indefinable annoyance, that expressive exaction of a servile deference, which was as marked in the gentlemen of the old school as their shoulder-knots, diamond buttons and swords, and which is still common in the more provincial English nobility and their institutions.

As regards the rules for self-instruction in literature, I would state that having during many years past frequently commended them to persons whose education has been partly neglected, and having witnessed in several cases

results beyond my expectations, I have been induced to give the hints in question a place in this volume, with the sincere hope that their efficacy, in which I have that faith which results from experience, may be generally tested.

It is the application of the principle of beginning with a few leading facts, of adding to them day by day, of constantly reviewing what has been learned, of assiduously combining and working up into new forms all the knowledge thus gained, and, in short, of developing the memory of the whole by association, which forms the method of teaching languages, so successfully followed by the pupils of OLLENDORFF and of AHN. My effort in these pages has been to indicate the plan by which this system may be practically applied to the acquisition not merely of a language, but of any other branch or branches of learning.

It may have occurred to the reader, that the manner in which foreign writers have found fault with the social peculiarities of the American people involves in reality a high compliment, since in judging of the conduct of the mass in this country, they invariably adopt as their standard that of the *first* class in their own nation. It

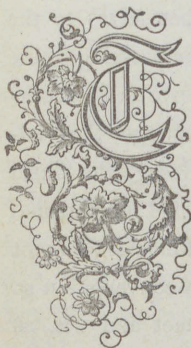
would be preposterous to compare the majority of our citizens to the peasants of Europe, and a knowledge of the facts involved proclaims that moral and intellectual culture is constantly making rapid advances in every division of society among us. Progress in all things, and above all things in advancing the dignity of labor, is in the United States no hackneyed axiom, but a great and living *truth*, which most men take warmly to heart, and in which they live and have their being. In this truth, thousands, as I now write, are risking their lives, and for it thousands of lives will yet be offered — all to advance the sum total of human happiness.

In the great system of social culture which occupies so prominent a place in that of progress, the arts of freely communicating our thoughts, and of acquiring knowledge, are anything but insignificant. If by the publication of a few chapters, most sincerely written in the hope of doing good, and which I trust are not entirely without some basis of observation and study. I shall succeed in aiding though but a little, those arts, my most earnest ambition will be fully realized.

THE AUTHOR.

INTRODUCTION

OF CONVERSATION IN GENERAL.



HERE is no social art in which it is so generally desirable to excel, as in Conversation.

The man or woman who can fulfil all the conditions of talking well, has at command a means of success which, when directed by common sense, is fully equal to all the advantages afforded by birth and fortune combined. With it the woman of moderate personal attractions can draw around her admirers, while the mere beauty remains a wall-flower.

Wealth and rank often lose their charms to the possessor, and even the exercise of accomplishments

at times grows wearisome. But the pleasure of well-sustained social intercourse always retains its zest. We love power; and of all power the most agreeable is that which comes from personal influence. It is for this reason that kings and other very eminent persons so often excel in conversation, and astonish the world by their happy faculty of adapting themselves to the most varied natures. They soon grow weary of the flattery addressed merely to their rank, and therefore devote themselves to the art of personally pleasing, or of impressing those whom they meet. And as they receive full encouragement and have every social advantage, they seldom fail to make rapid progress. George the Third has been greatly ridiculed as regarded his personal peculiarities, and yet it would be difficult to point out in any literature the report of a conversation so happily combining sense, courtesy, tact and wit, as that which he held with Doctor Johnson, as we find it narrated by the latter.

But it is not necessary to be a king to talk well, except so far as acquiring control over the kingdom of our mind is concerned. Every one who will devote himself to the art can acquire in it a degree of skill which will ensure respect in any society. By

practising dancing you learn to dance with ease; and by studying all the resources of conversation and by putting them in practice as often as opportunity occurs, you will end by talking well under the most trying circumstances, acquiring ease of manner and self-possession among those whose presence would otherwise be to you oppressive.

Conversation cannot be entirely learned from books, but books are quite capable of giving information, and of making suggestions which every lady or gentleman of ordinary intelligence can turn to good account in this art, and thereby acquire very great advantages. The author was acquainted with a gentleman of wide experience in society, who was noted for his agreeable conversation; and for this he owed much, as he confessed, to reading what had been written on the subject. No one will deny that the difference between well-bred and vulgar children, is in a great measure due to the precepts of parents; and yet all of those precepts may be given in black and white. If the reader who is conscious of any deficiency as regards the ability to appear to advantage in society, will set himself to work in good earnest to remedy his defects, even with no other teacher than a book, he may be confident of success

But to ensure it he must labor diligently. *Nil sine labore* — nothing without labor. Rules and examples should be borne in mind and assiduously followed at all times.

There is at least one great advantage in acquiring this very useful art — its practice demands no loss of time. On the contrary, when properly applied it saves time. Those who converse correctly, invariably induce others to talk more intelligibly with them, and such people even in making bargains, come more distinctly to terms. Every time the student speaks to any one, he may turn his knowledge to advantage. The porter at the street corner, the sailor lounging in the sun, the elegant lady with whom you exchange a few fleeting words in greeting; your servant, your principal, your officer, your friend, may all be made to aid in your mental culture and to *feel it* — so soon as you by pains and perseverance begin to realize that you are acquiring it. Nay, the most powerful minds can be led in any direction you will, as an elephant may be baited here and there by a child with a few grains of rice, if you choose to simply introduce or *lead* the subjects which pertain to the direction required. Rules — even rules in books — can be made of the greatest possible utility in these respects.

Language is the reflection of morals and manners, of the life and of the heart. He who endeavors to correct his conversation will also endeavor to correct the defects which control it. In leaving off abusive expressions one learns to cure the habit of *thinking* evil of others and of gloating over their faults — for after all said, the “hypocrites” who play such a part in old fashioned dramas — the men who use language to conceal their thoughts — have become rare in this age, because they succeed in deceiving very few. Many may fancy themselves adepts in the art of disguising their characters, but the vulgar, yet expressive, word “humbug” seldom fails to be commonly applied to them.

No man ever gave himself in earnest for any great length of time to the object of succeeding in the art of conversation, and of thereby making himself generally acceptable in society, without ridding himself of many defects, which if not positive vices, at least had nothing in common with goodness. To converse *well* is to acquire that delicate morality of the heart which leads on the one hand to kindness, and is on the other mysteriously allied to good taste in matters of life, of literature and of art. — Hence it will be found that in those circles where a

very high standard of social intercourse is exacted, and which is expressed and tested by excellence in conversation, genius is most readily freed from the clogs of prejudice, of suspicion and of vulgarity, and quickly manifests itself in great works. Talents are nowhere so rapidly developed as among people who in their intercourse aim at constant elegance and propriety in discourse or discussion, and this latter is not the result, but rather the *cause* of the development. It has often been a matter of wonder that great minds are more generally developed in groups, than singly; in cities than in the country. No one doubts that the same Anglo Saxon blood exists all over America or England, with the same average of talent; and in every corner of the two countries may be found highly educated men. But how much greater is the proportion of genius which is developed into actual results by social intercourse than by solitary reflection! The real reason for it is, that now and then a circle is formed whose members cultivate the art of mutual expression and of mutual intelligence — in other words *the art of conversation* — and thereby succeed in a short time in imparting to each other not merely a general knowledge of what they themselves know, but also

what they themselves *are*. Among men and women who consciously or unconsciously excel in conversation, experiences of travel and of adventure, of personal intercourse with eminent characters, and impressions of remarkable objects, are communicated with a vividness which no written description can convey. Tones, gestures, glances, attitudes and smiles supply a *color*, so to speak, remaining indelibly impressed upon the memory, and which no book can ever impart. A single reminiscence of Lord Byron, narrated by an accomplished "conversationalist," has made upon my mind an impression far more vivid, and which seemed to give a deeper insight to the personality of the poet, than did all of Lady Blessington's written experiences.

It will therefore be readily understood, that people of ability greatly increase that ability, and enable one another to produce great works, not merely by mutually meeting, but by cultivating the art of conversation so that they may give and take knowledge to the greatest possible advantage. As regards the pleasure to be derived from the proper exercise of the power which this art bestows, little need be said. One person, and especially any one accomplished woman, who excels in it, is enough to cast an air of

cheerfulness over a whole *soirée*; to sustain for weeks a spirit of gayety at the dullest watering-place; to draw together in any society and then draw out the best qualities of every one to advantage, to unite congenial minds which would otherwise have remained unknown to each other, and in fact to exert a genial influence as of sunshine in all places and at all times. It is usual to attribute such power entirely to "disposition" or to natural "gifts." Much is of course due in these happy instances to ability or to "advantages," but I am firmly convinced from observation, that after all it is chiefly owing to the expansion which is given by judicious cultivation of the art of conversation. The world is full of men and women of kindly feelings, and even of excellent educations, who have indeed every requisite to not only achieve social eminence but to elevate others with them — "if they only know how" — that is to say, if they could only impart their thoughts, sentiments or moods, with ease and tact, to others.

It may not be in the power of any writer to render every reader to this degree accomplished. But it is very possible that the reader may by perseverance do as much for himself; and I shall have suc-

ceeded in my object, should I be so fortunate as to induce any into whose hands this book may fall, and who may be conscious of a need of instruction as regards the subject of which it treats, to strive to remedy the defect.

CHAPTER I.

ATTENTION IN CONVERSATION.



THE best talkers are the best listeners" is an axiom which has been repeated, in one form or the other, in every cultivated language. "The duty of paying attention to what other people say is a fundamental law of the social code." You may be able to startle with your wit, move by your pathos, and thrill with your eloquence — but all this will not save you from being frequently a positive annoyance unless you have occasionally what Sidney Smith desired in a loquacious gentleman — a few flashes of silence.

The duller the intellect and the more limited the

knowledge and experience may be of the person with whom you talk, the more will he wish to hear himself, and the less will he desire to listen to you, save for applause and flattery. Bear patiently with such people, and content yourself with following the example of SIR WALTER SCOTT, by directing their conversation to subjects on which they can give you useful information. Remember that there are few persons from whom you cannot learn something, and that everything is worth knowing.

Whenever you meet with a man or woman who seems disposed, as the French say, to defray all the expenses of the conversation, you would do well to become a listener and limit yourself to an occasional remark, which you will have time to render piquant, and which, if apropos, will make the greater impression on your "subject." Patience is the first of all social virtues, but Silence is her most useful handmaid. And though you be even a JOB by nature, you will seldom take part in a conversation in which the two may not aid you. I can safely say, that in reviewing my own studies of conversation I find that those who produced the most favorable impression on all, were men or women who indicated the possession of great patience. No degree

of brilliancy or of knowledge will impress well bred people with a sense of superiority at all comparable to that which is awakened by patience and self-command. It is the true basis of the *savoir faire*, or "knowing how to act correctly under all circumstances," which is the whole art of being a man of the world.

It would be well if every one would once a day reflect on the proverb which states that we seldom get into trouble by saying too little, but very often by saying too much.

There is an inexpressible courtesy and a true nobility in deference and in attention when paid by children to parents; by young girls or ladies to any who are older than themselves, or by young men to any one. It indicates a very high degree of culture and refinement, and is an unfailing omen of success in life. But it becomes far more beautiful and noble when manifested by either old or young towards inferiors. Many people excel in courteously evading or getting rid of the conversation of others, but the lady or gentleman has mastered a much higher grade in the "art of living" who can listen with interest to all, especially to the poor and humble, without manifesting impatience, indifference or affectation of interest.

While silent in conversation and while listening, never stare away to the right or left, and be careful to avoid all appearance of inattention or of abstractedness. Look steadily at the speaker — if he or she be a person of sense it will be an admonition to be concise, for it is not kind to compel prolonged attention from those who are so courteous as to bestow it.

A French writer has however, ingeniously observed that one is justifiable in seeming to be inattentive or in a reverie when praised by another, or when a flattering allusion is in any way made to an action, a work or a remark which does him honor.

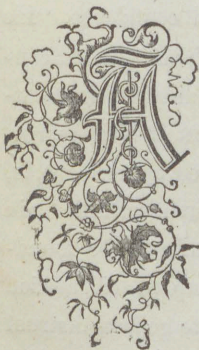
To attend to many persons, or to look steadily at them may require modifications. I have seen women as well as men who to whatever might be uttered, not excepting the lightest jests, never varied from a steady stare which seemed to say, "I will know the whole truth — you cannot deceive me." No rudeness was intended, but the impression which the stare gave was that of a want of courtesy. One may look steadily and yet politely.

To recur to my text, let the reader never forget in any conversation, under any circumstances, that

it is not only the best part of courtesy, but also of policy to be rather a listener than a speaker. Polhymnia, the muse of Eloquence herself is represented with a fore-finger on her lip to signify that silence if aptly employed sets off language to the best advantage.

CHAPTER II.

OF INSPIRING CONFIDENCE IN CONVERSATION.



REQUISITE element of agreeable conversation is that it be unrestrained, and to do this you must inspire confidence in your discretion.

Strive by every means in your power to avoid the reputation of a tattler. Never repeat to a soul a syllable which was not intended for repetition. Make it a point of personal pride to be reserved on this subject.

Few persons seem to be aware of the advantages which are to be derived from having the character of never repeating anything that is told them. Most people in the warmth of conversation say much which

they trust will be kept secret, and quite as many, it may be added, repeat nearly all of these confidences, hoping that an injunction to secrecy will protect them from all consequences. How can they hope that others will be more truthful than themselves?

But those who are truly faithful in their reserve enjoy an advantage, as regards making friends, which it is difficult to exaggerate. With many women, the mere conviction of such a merit in a man is enough to insure intimacy and unreserved confidence. He who hopes to become a favorite with the fair sex cannot begin too soon, or labor too assiduously, in creating the impression that the most trivial secret, whether imparted to him or acquired by accident, is, in his keeping, perfectly safe. But it will be vain to attempt to gain this character unless it be founded *in fact*. A single bit of gossip in circulation stamped with your name, will excite general distrust and doubt as to your fidelity. If you can establish a character *with yourself* for secrecy, others will soon elevate it to something remarkable.

The whole world is full of people craving for confidence — people to whom a secret is like gold in a child's pocket, burning to be issued. Those who are high in rank and blessed with every advantage are

often tormented for want of "a true friend;" meaning thereby some one to whom they can confide secrets. And on those who will simply take them and *keep* them, they are willing to bestow friendship. To those who would be in such confidence it is enough that they follow the advice already given of never being directly or indirectly the means of disseminating gossip of any kind.

In connection with this subject I may properly advise the reader against *curiosity*. There are people who cannot see a letter without craving to know to whom it is addressed, or who cannot find anything written lying on a table, without involuntarily picking it up. The Paul Pry is the meanest character of society, and he who would feel superior in strength and in integrity should strive vigorously to have nothing in common with such a type of baseness.

Bear continually in mind the fact that in the art of conversation the secret of success lies not so much in knowing what to say, as in what to avoid saying.

Every man or woman of ordinary intelligence can

by resolutely acquiring information and imparting it in correct language, become a good talker. But to become a good conversationalist, it is necessary to influence the minds of others. You must establish a genial and sympathetic tone between yourself and the one with whom you discourse, so that in the end your friend may retain the conviction that *he* has said nothing which sober second thought would disapprove, or to which you would recur with doubt. To do this is always in the power of either. It consists in following rigorously the simple rule:

“Those please most who offend the least.”

It is not enough to refrain in conversation from annoying those who are present, or from censuring the absent. It is extremely characteristic of a gentleman or lady to abstain from *all* gossip whatever or from meddling reference to other people and their affairs. I am aware of the very great difficulty of determining what is, or is not, proper to be discussed of other people. Many things *must* be known, and of many others that knowledge which at one time seems impertinent, at another proves to be proper and profitable. The most sensible people not unfrequently show themselves gratified at learning that you are not ignorant of matters in relation to them,

which, strictly speaking, it is none of your business to know. And a knowledge of the good or bad fortunes of those whom you encounter may have a serious influence in determining the character of your intercourse.

All of this, and much more, may be adduced by those who defend the practice of gossiping. Yet it remains true that, after all, those who least indulge in such meddling meanness are the least seldom entangled in troubles through ignorance. To be able to resolutely avoid listening to comments on the family affairs, intentions, or mistakes of other people, requires not only firmness but *tact*, and the one who is possessed of this will seldom be involved in difficulties resulting from avoiding gossip. The lady or gentleman who can successfully achieve such a triumph will at once assume a high position as regards understanding and threading the entanglements of life and of society. It may not be clear to the youthful reader *why* this should be so, but if he or she will implicitly follow the rule of strictly avoiding all gossip whatever, the time will come when the immense advantages gained from such observance will be as a bright light over a whole life time.

And while on this subject I may appropriately ob-

serve its connection with an accomplishment of very great importance, which is generally regarded as being entirely a natural gift. I refer to *tact*; to that judicious employment of our powers just at the right time, which is so useful in life. And with it I may also mention that happy exercise of wisdom by which one is enabled to avoid those embarrassments into which the young are especially liable to fall.

It is the want of these gifts which the inexperienced in life contemplate with most dread. Let them console themselves with the reflection, that the most certain means of acquiring them is to very strictly adhere to the rule of doing as you would be done by at all times, and on all occasions, firmly resisting all temptation to the contrary. This, with the cultivation of knowledge, and of such arts of society, and accomplishments, as you can master, will be certain to impart, in time, that firmness and confidence which, when allied to grace, invariably bestow tact and practical wisdom.

I trust that the reader will not regard these remarks as the mere commonplaces of morality. They are matters of sound common sense and their application gives the best possible basis for forming an ele-

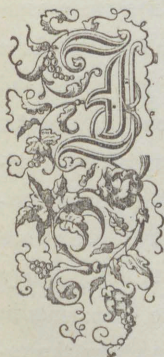
gant man or woman of the world, of the type which is now becoming most admired and respected. At this day society is rapidly undergoing great changes. Drinking and gambling and extravagance are no longer encouraged in respectable circles as they were in the days of the gentlemen of the old school, and the heartless maxims of Chesterfield are now studied only in that second class, which always unconsciously occupies a position far behind the true leaders. I know that the young are still generally under the impression that brilliancy in society, elegance and grace in manner and in conversation, have nothing in common with love for all mankind, with forgiving our enemies, and with endeavoring assiduously to do good in every way to old and young, rich and poor. I know that it is too often believed that tenderness of heart and conscience are not to be reconciled with the character of a gay man or woman of the world, with fashion and cosmopolite style. But it is a great error, so very great that I know that all of these latter fascinations may be *best* acquired with the aid of a good heart. It is time the ridiculous error were dissipated — that one must needs be more or less hardened and frivolous to enjoy life in its most elegant phases. The truth is, that the really *best* peo-

ple in the world ought to be among those who best know it — and there is no reason why they should not occupy such a position.

I trust that the reader who is desirous of excelling in conversation will peruse this chapter more than once. Should he or she succeed in thoroughly extirpating the habit of which it treats, I might perhaps conclude with this page — so confident am I that one so much purified at heart would through life meet with every social encouragement from all whose good opinion would be worth having.

CHAPTER III.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE. DRESS. ORNAMENTS.



IN a well known French work on conversation, the first three chapters are devoted to the teeth, the mouth, and the tongue. To those who would excel in the art, the suggestion may not however be amiss that as regards personal appearance there should be neither striking defects nor effects. Not only should the *teeth*, as the French writer suggests, be kept scrupulously neat, and with them the minutest details of the entire person, but the hair and dress should be strictly within the average limits of the fashion of the day. The reason for this is manifest — there should be nothing to distract the eye or divert the attention

from the expression of the countenance, or from the words of the person conversing. The slightest neglect of cleanliness is quite enough, with the majority of refined people, to mingle a feeling of disgust with the most favorable impressions, even though they may be quite unconscious of the source of the disagreeable feeling — for such defects often open to us, we know not why, a long train of offensive associations. Neat toilettes and good clothes are to be commended, since they are in a certain sense a compliment to all with whom you associate. But for a man, jewelry and striking ornaments, gay colors and all that *attracts* the eye form serious drawbacks. People of experience in the world, especially intelligent and shrewd women, are prompt to form conclusions from foppish eccentricities of dress, which are seldom to the credit of the wearer; and though they may pay a tribute of admiration to the ornaments in themselves, it will always be discounted from the respect due to the mind of the one who bears them.

It is far safer to trust to an old coat, than to rely on the slightest neglect of neatness escaping observation.

Cheap imitative elegance is invariably vulgar, and indicates the mere fac-simile of what is in itself at

best little better than ornamental barbarism. It is well set forth by *Punch* :

Believe me if all these ridiculous charms
Which I see on thy watch-guard to-day,
Were to-morrow locked up in the pawn-broker's arms,
Some trifling advance to repay,
Thou wouldst still be the snob which this moment thou art,
Let thy vanity think what it will;
For those shining red buttons, that breast-pin so smart,
And those studs, show vulgarity still ! ”

I am perfectly aware that with many men the tendency to gaudy color and display is irrepressible. Perhaps it is well that such is the case, since it is a matter of some importance that the weak-minded should be promptly known whenever met, and we may therefore regard the tendency as equivalent to the wise provision of Nature by which we are enabled to distinguish parrots and macaws from the birds of pleasanter temper and song.

A lady being asked what opinion she had formed of the conversation of a certain young gentleman, replied : “ Do not ask *me* ! I can remember nothing of it all but a horrible great red coral ball on his cravat, which rolled against all my ideas and knocked them down like nine-pins ! ”

CHAPTER IV.

OF SATIRE, SARCASM, AND TEASING.



EVER say anything unpleasant when it can by any possibility be avoided.

It is to be regretted that witty satire and keen retorts are so generally relished. Many persons seem to be under the impression that without sarcasm social intercourse must of necessity be dull. It is indeed too frequently believed that all wit must cut as well as shine. The temptations to indulge in this form of rudeness are consequently to many, irresistible. They learn that a single sarcasm or a stinging reply promptly conceived and well expressed often establishes a reputation. If they look into the past, they

find that many men of letters, statesmen and artists, who would otherwise have been forgotten, still live in anecdotes which do credit to their heads, but very little to their hearts. They observe, too, that all manner of faults are corrected or punished by wit, and that people who would otherwise become social plagues, are frequently held in check by the fear of pointed ridicule.

But unfortunately very few observe the degree to which the *abuses* of witty sarcasm out-balance its benefits. A majority of all quarrels and ill-feelings spring from this source. Where impertinence is once crushed by wit, it is a hundred times goaded to insolence and revenge. In nearly all instances of "deserved castigations" by pointed repartee, it will be found they might have been avoided without a sacrifice of dignity, in some manner far more creditable to the intelligence of the one replying. And it should be borne in mind, that very few persons who have once become notorious for keen retorts fail to become positive nuisances. Having brought down with a single shot some one who is fair game, they end by setting up an "infernal machine" against the whole world.

It has been said that by strictly avoiding the

temptation to use slang, we end by discovering not only more correct, but even far more striking expressions as an equivalent. So it will be found that by refraining from satire and sarcasm, wit, far from being diminished, greatly increases its real power and value. Even when it is absolutely necessary to reply to insolence with a retort, and when the happiest form of a cutting answer promptly suggests itself, you should remember that it is always possible to retain the wit and administer the reproof in a manner which expresses your disinclination to inflict pain. Such triumphs of skill and kind-heartedness indicate a degree of nobility which deeply impresses every one whose admiration is worth winning.

It may be seriously doubted whether any person famed for frequent satirical retorts was ever at heart either a gentleman or lady. The professed "wit" grasps at his weapons as naturally as a groom in a quarrel grasps at a stable-fork. A man whose head and heart are alike cultivated may, like a gentleman, when taken unawares, seize the same implement, and with it defeat his foes; but he casts it aside when all is over, as though he regretted the necessity which compelled him to use it. It is very significant, that the lower the society, the greater is the relish for smart

and tart sayings. At a certain depth of vulgarity we continually hear in conversation, efforts at satire followed by bitter recrimination and endless quarrelling. I trust that the young reader who aims at success in conversation and at thorough accomplishment, will reflect deeply on this subject. He cannot fail to ascertain that whatever may be repeated with admiration of the wits of the last generation, or of our own, that on the whole this species of brilliant vulgarity, which made a reputation for a Douglas Jerrold, is rapidly losing ground in cultivated society.

There is a character to be very frequently met with, which is too often imitated by those desirous of acquiring an easy, independent tone in conversation. I refer to both men and women who indulge in "churlish flings and boorish slurs" at the present or the absent in a cool, smiling, easy manner, which they fondly believe passes for polished satire and keen irony. Elderly and imperfectly educated fops, who wish to be thought wits and men of the world, are much given to this style of impertinence. It abounds, however, among all the coarser varieties of people, who think by profuse expenditure and costly dress, to cover defects of intellect and of early as-

sociations. They think that an elegant air may be put on as a garment. Nothing is so easy indeed to assume as this ironical and personal vein, which is intended to only slightly annoy, without being carried so far as to give serious grounds for a quarrel. It proclaims unmistakably, imperfect culture or real vulgarity endeavoring to masquerade as elegance, though it is by no means unfrequent among those whose associations should have taught them better.

Avoid at all times in conversation all manner of liberties. "Teasing" is a favorite amusement with many, and is not unfrequently carried, as regards youthful victims, to such an extent as to utterly ruin dispositions which would otherwise have been excellent. It generally leads to irritation and insult. Persons who habitually tease in any manner whatever, directly or indirectly, may be possessed of many excellent qualities, but they are not entitled to true respect; nor is any one, who fails in respect towards others, or in regard for their feelings.

The incurable "tease" who cannot refrain from annoyances, is indeed invariably an individual whose intellect is in some respect deficient or disordered, and who is therefore to be avoided. Such persons are frequently gifted with wit, and, occasionally, with

polished (not *refined*) manners, but they are dangerous companions, as their irritating disposition is apt to communicate itself to those whom they are in the habit of attacking.

CHAPTER V.

OF CENSURE AND FAULT FINDING.



THOSE who would excel in conversation should beware of censuring.

There are persons who seldom talk without blaming some one, or carping, grumbling and disapproving. The faults of others are as their very breath. They seem to be forever looking down; and, to judge them by their own accounts, one might imagine that they had never, in all their lives, associated or met with a decent or reputable human being.

It is unfortunately true that a very large proportion of social conversation consists of fault-finding, or of remarks derogatory to the character of the

absent. Here and there, indeed, we encounter a truly noble nature, which recognizes the vileness of abusive gossip and avoids it. I would have the reader adopt such a character as an ideal to be followed out at all risks, at all times, and under every temptation. Let him resolve every morning that no needless word of censure shall during the day pass his lips; and when he shall have so long adhered to the resolution as to feel quite certain that he has cured himself of the vice, he may indulge in the proud consciousness of being at heart not only a gentleman, but a gentleman who has few peers in the first circles of any land.

There are few persons who do not regard a man or woman who never speaks ill of others as of truly noble character. Such instances of magnanimity are rare, but they never fail to be duly honored. In society their words meet with marked attention, for they are invariably truthful, and the world knows that what they say will be discolored by no malice or uncharitableness. Very elegant and highly accomplished women of the world sometimes accomplish this great triumph over the most insidious fault of our nature, and thereby wonderfully increase their abilities in the art of pleasing.

It is within the power of every young person to make and keep a resolution never to utter a word directly or indirectly uncomplimentary to any one. If such young persons should be offered a fortune dependent upon success in this, how earnestly would they guard every utterance! And yet no fortune would ever be of such real benefit to any youth as a heart pure and free from all carping and censure.

Owing to a strange delusion, very few are really aware of their own habit of indulgence in this vice, though they readily remark it in others. I believe, indeed, that the worst offenders would be amazed should they learn the truth. If you have any doubt on the subject, set down thrice a day in a blank book, as nearly as you can recal it, every word which you have said of any one which you would not repeat to his face, or have said of yourself. If you occasionally review the volume you will, in all probability, be induced to reform the habit.

CHAPTER VI.

OF COMPLIMENTS.



THE spirit of a compliment is the expression of something agreeable to another person.

It is therefore absurd to broadly condemn it, since the whole art of pleasing is more or less directly that of complimenting. The most benevolent or generous act to an equal, loses much of its value if utterly devoid of compliment — that delicate homage by which we imply that certain excellencies or merits in another have made upon us a something more than superficial impression.

Women — or men — who are not familiar with

the world, or skilled in conversation, invariably express, and perhaps feel, a dislike to compliments. They are either suspicious and doubt the sincerity of all praise, or, as is more frequently the case, they find themselves unable to turn the compliment with an adroit answer or graceful reply, and are consequently rather vexed than pleased with it. Much of this comes from an uneasy fear of covert ridicule, of being "quizzed" or held at an advantage. It is needless to say that such feelings or fears never annoy a cultivated woman, or any one gifted with proper self respect.

It is true there are compliments to which objection may justly be raised. Some are coarse, some clumsy, others trivial, and others worn out; but they almost invariably correspond to the character and conversation of those who utter them, and if we are frequently annoyed, it is generally our fault.

But no compliment should be too severely judged, unless it be manifestly a downright sarcasm or insult in disguise. The flattest flattery implies at least on the part of the one uttering it, a desire to commend himself to favorable consideration, and has a more creditable ground than scandal, satire and gossip.

I have already intimated that the crowning excellence of conversation, as a mere art, is, not to acquire a reputation for excellency in it, lest through notoriety we lose naturalness. To pay compliments well, especially to young women, one should not have the reputation of being profuse in praise, or, as girls sometimes phrase it, of "having the hat-full ready."

Yet as every expression of congenial appreciation and admiration is really a compliment, it is evident that the art should be cultivated — I dare not say studied — since a studied compliment has been declared to be none at all. Sincere admiration, elegantly or wittily expressed, is acceptable to most people, and is the most effective means of persuasion for a lover. And it need not be directly oral. Expressive and respectful glances — not stares, — adroit commendation of certain qualities in other people which are shared by the one you compliment, all belong to the art. If we carefully study any person's tastes, tendencies, accomplishments and associations, opportunities for sincere and pleasing compliments will occur continually.

Of all compliments the most agreeable are those in which the one paying them seems to be uncon-

scious of so doing, and is at the same time warmly in earnest. When offered in this manner to a lady she is doubly gratified, — first with the compliment, and secondly, with her own penetration at having detected a real feeling in relation to herself.

Beautiful women are readily convinced by a glance or by demeanor that their charms are appreciated. All of them, however, who have any claims to culture, will, when the first tribute is paid, be best pleased with *appreciative* compliments paid to their intelligence, accomplishments, "spirit," kindness of heart, tastes, habits, hopes and associations. A very beautiful woman who believes that she has excited a deep admiration for some quality *other* than her beauty — especially if it be one for which the world gives her little credit — is always gratified. "I heard that you said a very good thing lately," "There is an excellent remark going the rounds which I hear attributed to you," will be found much more gratifying to a person who has no established reputation for wit, than to any other. And as there are very few persons who *never* say anything worth repeating, it is an easy matter to pay such compliments in all sincerity.

There are few persons living who are not more

or less interested in the opinion of others. Men, as a rule, are gratified to know not merely that women have praised them in their absence, but even that they have been favorably spoken of to the dames. If you can inform A that you had conversed with B in reference to him, and that the conversation had been such as to give B a favorable impression of A, or had drawn a compliment from him, you will yourself pay an agreeable compliment by referring to it, especially if your words and manner are aptly managed. If B occupy a high position, A will assuredly never forget the fact. There need be neither impropriety or insincerity in thus promoting kindly feelings between people.

After all said on the subject, it is certain that to an intelligent and cultivated mind there are few women of intelligence entirely devoid of personal attractions; and almost every human being, though he or she may have even relinquished all claim to be beautiful, still clings to the very last to a faith in a certain "expression," which, if *properly appreciated*, must raise the whole personality to admiration. And instances are not unfrequent in which women who were either beautiful, piquant, pleasing or "sympathetic," have heard so little of

the language of admiration, that the first report of a really genial compliment paid them, thrilled through the heart like fire. This is sometimes the case when a sister has attracted all the admiration. There are again instances in which a lady may have a good enough opinion of herself, and yet be quite incapable of appreciating the peculiar or real reason why she is admired. I could cite the instance of a lover of art, who had a special admiration for the singular face of a statue in the Louvre, and who had the strange fortune to find it almost identically realized as a living fac simile in the features of a young girl who was by no means accustomed to praise of her beauty. Very often, peculiar associations like this will render certain countenances charming to us, which is the secret, by the way, why ignorant boys and girls, who are without such associations, are extremely critical and conventional in their judgment of personal attractions, while men of wide experience and knowledge are far more generally appreciative, and more easily pleased. In short, where we wish to compliment, the opportunity to do so with sincerity and credit to ourselves is seldom wanting, when our tastes are cultivated.

Compliments are frequently uttered as good

natured jokes, not to be taken literally, and yet to be accepted as manifesting at least politeness. Thus in a book on Italy, a gentleman while admiring a picture of Louis XIV surrounded by the ladies of his court, is represented as remarking that "he would gladly have been in that monarch's place at that time." To which the painter of the picture — a Frenchman — replied that "he certainly knew no gentleman who could have filled it with more credit to himself, or, more agreeably to the ladies. Such a compliment is a mere trifle, and cannot go beyond a laugh and a gay reply, but, as the world goes, with many men and women it would produce a better impression than the most elaborate wisdom.

Do not forget, however, that in compliments as well as in all that you say, the manner, style, address and tone have, in ordinary conversation, quite as much to do with success, as the *sentiment*. Many people smirk when about to speak; others have an intolerable air of *preamble*, which seems to promise that something remarkable (in the opinion of the speaker) is coming. Some acquire a *manner* of saying everything, which is not agreeable, as it betrays consciousness of intending to produce an effect. In short, there is but one rule, — be *natural*.

By carefully observing and noting down some scores of compliments, or of remarks which have made an agreeable impression, and by studying and comparing them, the reader will be able to attain proficiency in classifying these butterflies of the social garden, and he certainly will learn to word his own compliments more aptly. This will be an easy matter, since the proportion of people who will cheerfully supply you with such as have been addressed to themselves, is by no means small.

A compliment is nothing if it is not sincere, and it should no more be confounded with flattery, than pride with vanity.

CHAPTER VII.

OF EGOTISM IN CONVERSATION.



IN conversation make as few references as possible to yourself.

Beware of giving the slightest indication that you habitually realize your own merits.

This is, however, equivalent to urging you to begin with first principles, and to conquer the habit, since no one who has formed it can conceal it.

Egotism is the most insidious and effective poison of merit. No matter how wise, how witty, learned, brave, or beautiful one may be, self-consciousness spoils all its effects, and even a child can render the least vanity ridiculous. It is the greatest of blem-

ishes in social intercourse, and should be most scrupulously shunned in its every form. A French writer has spoken of people in whose manner could be detected "suppressed vanity," and of different varieties of such people. The truth is, that the habit — for it is only a mere habit — must be *cured*, not disguised. Suppressing egotism does not mean crushing self-confidence or pride, but the destroying a silly habit of continually looking at self as another personage parading about on the stage of life, and anxiously caring for what is said of it, or studying the effects which it produces. The fault is rapidly developed by much indulgence in "small talk," and above all by continually gossiping of other people — of families, marriages, engagements, "attentions," fortunes, and what is *said* by everybody of every body else.

Men and women who are weak and ignorant enough to believe that a general knowledge of the affairs of others indicates familiarity with "society" and the world, are, without exception, egotists of the ridiculous stamp. Nothing but a weak vanity can induce man or woman to become the "Jenkins" or current chronicle of "the fashion" in any city, village or hamlet. People not unfrequently encourage

the "Jenkins" by smiles and praise, but they always despise the character in their hearts. It is very easy to understand that the giving much thought to little transitory personal trifles of no value in themselves, rapidly increases the fault of shallow vanity. He who is continually busy with reflecting on what people think and say of each other, will be quite certain to keep a place for himself with the rest. This is the reason why in very gossiping circles there are few efforts of genius, and few genial and earnest minds, for all is killed by reflected egotism.

Never speak of your own peculiarities.

Many persons acquire a gay habit of merry boasting, or of humorous gasconading — so called from the Gascons, a brave and talented people, who however utterly destroy all respect for their real merit by their habits of vaunting. He who would avoid vanity should have absolutely nothing to do with it — not even to burlesque it. Self is our most insidious foe, and he who boasts in fun will soon find earnest thoughts gliding into the current of his jests. In short, avoid everything which may suggest, however remotely, to those with whom you converse, the suspicion that you think of the effect you produce.

There are people who can speak in detail of themselves and their works without vanity, and there are others who cannot tell you the day of the month without some ridiculous manifestation of self-consciousness.

Avoid intimacy with weak minds, or at least evade as much as possible indulging them in their idle gossip, if you would escape vanity. Ignorance takes refuge in personality, and people who care nothing for books, or art, or amusements, or beautiful subjects or great questions of general interest *will* talk about one another and of themselves. "The more culture the less vanity," is a rule by which one may accurately determine the nature of the society in which he finds himself. If you are obliged to associate with back-biters, gossips and egotists, intimate to them as quietly as you can, and without hurting their feelings, that you wish to avoid their favorite topics. If you *persistently* refrain from such subjects for a few weeks you will realize to a remarkable degree the benefit of such discipline.

Persons who can be aware that another is endeavoring to cure himself of a defect, and will yet ridicule him for it, deserve to be distinctly ranked as morally *vile*.

Taking one vice with another there is not one which makes so much mischief as is caused by censoriousness and gossip, yet we seldom find vigorous efforts made to extirpate them, and it is but fair to inform the inexperienced reader that in circles where there is not a high degree of culture, he will meet with many who regard themselves as very moral persons who will actually discourage his efforts to avoid gossip and vanity. Let him, however, persevere and he will succeed. Life was never given to us that our thoughts should all be given to the betrothals, successes, and private affairs of people, or to what figure we cut before them. Had it been so, there would not have been the slightest occasion for bestowing on us reason or intellect.

Do not in conversation refer *too* frequently to scenes in which you have figured; to great people whom you have known; to your travels, your successes, or to anything on which you may be supposed to congratulate yourself. If possible, avoid recurring often to trains of thought and associations connected with your "strong points," since most people, and especially women, are very apt at detecting vanity. Do not however as some do, scrupulously avoid all mention whatever of your experiences and

fortunes. There are men who carry this to an absurd degree of affectation, and abstain from the slightest reference to their travels, or what they have seen, or of which they were a part. This is only vanity in a more refined form. Many "honest folk" expect from a traveller, or any other who has achieved what is to them at least a celebrity, some entertaining anecdotes which they themselves may cite. Such excellent souls can no more comprehend motives for reserve than an Arab would similar modesty in a hadji from Mecca. Whenever you can appropriately and modestly draw upon your experience for an illustration, do so. Rely upon it that opportunities will not be wanting.

Do not talk so as to display your wealth or your habitual familiarity with it, or with rich people. This disgusting form of vanity is very common in the United States, and gives an excellent standard for ascertaining the real social position and culture of many who are well guarded against detection in other respects. It is an insidious fault, and one full of temptation in circles where money-getting is the chief occupation. It displays itself in the affectation of forgetting what some expensive article costs, and in speaking of expenditures as trifles, when they

were really matters of serious consideration. It is betrayed in the vulgar habit of never alluding to a wealthy man without speaking of his riches, or to a respectable family in moderate circumstances, without declaring that they are "poor as Job." When you are yourself well off, such a style of reference to others, especially before those who are not so prosperous, is truly contemptible, even when no "hints" are intended, and no offence is given. This form of vanity is also seen in the habitual endeavor to create the impression that one's mind at least is familiar with luxury. Such people talk nothing but gems and divans, Tokay and costly steeds, sables and three-pile velvet. Others roll over with a relish, the names of the millionaires of the day, and will mention with pride the having been in company with some great Shylock's agent, as though there were something gilding in the very neighborhood of a man who deals in large sums. It is shown in a tendency to increase figures when speaking of sums. There are men who, in narrating an anecdote of a wager never place the sum at less than "*ten* thousand dollars;" and like them are the women whose friend's diamonds are always said to be worth "*thirty* thousand." The same vanity is

displayed in volunteering to tell the price of every article in your possession, or in asking that of articles belonging to others — a thing which should be done as seldom as *possible*, and always with an apology — or at least with that straight-forwardness which in some persons speaks of itself a pressing reason, devoid of all idle curiosity.

Avoid *very* frequent conversation on any subject in which you are notoriously interested. If you have a specialty in politics, religion, or in any other direction, it will be often enough referred to by others without your introducing it. If you are physically strong, or handsome, or accomplished in any arts, do not make strength and beauty and your favorite abilities, even indirectly, a frequent subject of discussion.

Beware of a peculiar form of vanity which consists in making confidences of your private affairs to many people, and in binding every acquaintance to solemn secrecy as to this or that matter relative to yourself or friends. Weak people often think by such confidence to attract intimacy, but the confided-in seldom fail, on reflection, to attribute it to mere vanity.

Of all follies, never seek to make capital in gen

eral conversation by communicating to any mortal whatever, your misfortunes, grievances and losses. Whatever momentary sympathy you may attract will, in too many cases, be entirely neutralized on the fatal sober second thought of those in whom you may confide. That is a pitiful vanity indeed, which would sooner expose its defeats from Fortune, than not talk of self. More absurd still is the confession of your private faults and vices — a species of vanity frequent enough among would-be romantic people of a school which is now becoming generally ridiculous. On this subject a French writer has well remarked, that “you should always avoid mention of yourself, since, if it be an eulogium, people will regard it as a lie; while if you criticise yourself, they will take you at your word, and accept it as an article of faith.”

In short, never allude in any way, or under any circumstances, where it can be avoided, to your own excellencies or defects.

It is very vain to use strong and emphatic assertions, such as “*I* know,” “I am *positively* certain,” “Yes — but *I* happen to know *all* about it.” It is intolerably conceited, and in most instances irritates, without exciting the slightest respect for

your declaration. Always substitute "I think," "I believe," "It seems to me," "Excuse me, but I think I have heard," &c. It is not enough to limit your words in this respect, you should never emphasize the voice too forcibly. One may say. 'I beg your pardon, Sir," with an expression equivalent to a flat and insulting contradiction.

Still more vain and vulgar is the use of such expressions as "H'm!" "Pshaw!" "Much you know about it!" "Stuff!" and "Fiddlesticks!" These expressions and others like them of a strongly dissentient nature, should never be uttered by any one under *any* circumstances whatever. They are all rude, as is indeed every word and every emphasis which *directly* expresses denial of any assertion.

A very improper manifestation of vanity is shown in giving advice rather with a view to displaying superior wisdom, than to really assist a sufferer. A very common form of such weakness consists in advising in vague and general terms which are of no practical significance, and convey no new idea. One may repeat a hundred times: "be industrious! be thrifty! be enterprising" — but unless the advice be accompanied with some practical illustration or application, its result will in most cases be to irritate.

Never talk simply to hear yourself talk, or for effect. Be especially on your guard against this when more than one person is listening to you, for then the temptation will often be great to speak merely from display.

Every time you converse with any one it will be your own fault if you have done nothing to create a favorable impression. But all displays of vanity are unfavorable.

Beware at all times of social oratory. The parlor lecturer is a common form of vanity, especially among men of humble origin who have unexpectedly developed some intellectual power, and risen to a little public consideration. Small orators, small clergymen, small poets and small politicians are all given to this weakness. They love the sound of their own voices and are not in the habit of reflecting that all professional display in private is silly.

Never undertake to *lead* in conversation. Do not when you are about to narrate something look about and enforce silence. If you say good things the world will soon find it out. Never try to be a "lion," or to do all the talking. I have seen a gentleman noted for his stories, look positively offended after having monopolized the entire attention

of a large company for an hour, because another person ventured to tell a tale of the same stamp as his own. It is all vanity.

If you remember any one distinctly after a long absence, do not affect to have forgotten him, even though he should be so weak as to do so. Nonchalance is at best an ornament of very doubtful elegance, and is now rather old-fashioned. It is generally accompanied by egotism, and leads every one who deliberately cultivates it into the commission of countless petty falsehoods and many acts of real rudeness. To affect to forget what you really remember is, after all, *untrue*—and honesty is the first qualification of a gentleman or lady. I would lay great stress on the avoiding this affectation of indifference, since it is unfortunately still prevalent in all classes of society. If you really cannot at first recal any one, be certain to speak out honestly (and eagerly, if you feel the *slightest* inclination to do so,) as soon as you begin to remember any circumstance in connection with your former intercourse.

Whenever any instance of vanity or affectation strikes you in others, note it down and strictly avoid it in future in your own person. If you hear a per-

son outshouting an entire congregation in responses or "amens," remember that vanity seeks for effect, and sink your own voice. Nearly all eccentricity whatever is in fact only shallow vanity. Avoid *oddity* of every kind whatever in your external appearance or manners or conversation. If you diligently cultivate your mind and study assiduously to please in conversation, you will soon become noted and that in the most agreeable way.

It is to be regretted that French writers on etiquette and conversation insist so strongly on *vanity* as the real basis of all character. In a work which is in many other respects excellent, I find for instance these axioms:

"It is not necessary to be really modest, but at least attempt to appear so."

"Modesty, or that which seems to be such, is a speculation on the vanity of others." *

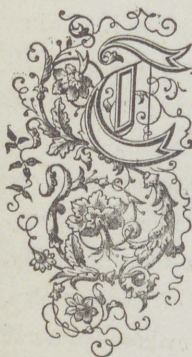
Let the young reader rest assured that it is necessary to *be* modest as well as to appear so, and that that virtue *may* be acquired by practice. By associating with those who excel you in your own especial merits, you will improve these, and at the same time

* *L'Art de Causer, Encyclopedie de la Conversation.* *Par M. SAINT MAURICE, Paris 1834.

learn to avoid vanity. And remember, he who cultivates modesty does not disqualify himself for success in the world. In acquiring it you also gain confidence and firmness. Impudence is generally the cloak of indecision and of cowardice.

CHAPTER VIII.

POLITENESS. ITS BASIS. ITS APPLICATION.



HE basis of all true politeness is kindness.

All politeness should be real, and from the heart. If you constantly strive to reason away your prejudices against people, you will become polite. Most of our dislikes have very little foundation.

A large proportion of them spring from idle gossip, from fancied slights, or from trials of our temper which we could very easily forgive, were it really our interest to do so.

But it is always our interest to keep on the best terms with every one who is not really bad or disreputable. To do this one must maintain an un-

ceasing watch over his or her temper, and suffer no opportunity to escape, however trifling, of gratifying others. If kindness of heart be the *first* requisite in politeness, it is quite as true that *assiduity* is not less needed.

Let memory be on the alert to recal anything which may be agreeable or serviceable to those with whom you converse, and keep your eyes and ears open to seize the opportunity for any friendly office, no matter how trifling. *Politeness*, be it remembered, includes "polish, elegance, ease and gracefulness of manner, united with a desire to please others, and a careful attention to their wants and wishes." The first step towards achieving grace is to be quietly confident and feel at ease in any society. If your language be good, your knowledge creditable, your personal appearance devoid of eccentricity, and if you have learned to avoid making yourself "conspicuous," there is no reason why you should not be firm and assured, anywhere. Do not vex yourself with thoughts of inferiority, but "be yourself to yourself," and a little familiarity with the world will soon teach you the absurdity of timidity. Ease rapidly brings grace if any effort whatever be made to say and do kindly things in a cheerful and conciliatory way.

Exercise your attention and your thoughts when in company. If you find that bashfulness and embarrassment without cause occasionally afflict you in society, banish them by finding something to do or say *forthwith*. Do not stop to argue with yourself but *act* promptly. Ask for an introduction to any body, and talk of the weather or the walking, or the rooms, or any trifles, till something better suggests itself. The first step in politeness is to make such efforts, and they are a duty. In society you owe them to your host or hostess who does not of course like to see a gloomy or embarrassed guest. And you owe them at all times, in all places, to everybody, as a matter of politeness.

Do not think it a matter of indifference whether you pick up a fan for some humble old dame, eagerly or indifferently. If your mind be active, (*and you can make it so* by frequently thinking of such matters,) it will occur to you that a little attention of the kind with an appearance of prompt, earnest courtesy is *very* gratifying to old people; and therefore you will probably on such reflection show active service with downright good will. And if, a minute after, you have an opportunity to render the same courtesy to the belle of the ball-room, you will find

that you do it all the better for your previous service.

The young of either sex should remember that all the little attentions, salutations, civilities and graces of "society" are as strictly due in the home circle to sisters, brothers, parents and others, as at a party, and that courtesy, like charity, begins at home. Boys and girls should be taught never to receive anything from the hands of a servant without expressing thanks, and all services whatever, from all persons, should be acknowledged in like manner.

The higher ladies or gentlemen are placed in society, and the more refined their politeness, the more frequently do they speak courteously to servants and to all humble people. French ladies and gentlemen very generally salute their dependents as they would their acquaintances, while it has been remarked of the English in the highest circles, that they never notice the existence of those who minister to their wants, and worship the same GOD with them in the same family-chapel, any more than if they were so many machines. Of late years this discreditable rudeness has been a little modified, but it is still very general.

If it should occur to you that an article which

meets your eye in a newspaper would interest a friend, do not neglect or forget it, but take measures so that he may see it as soon as possible. Remember that to most persons, especially to the young and to ladies, gifts, however trifling, are always acceptable, and that a shell, a coin, a drawing, in short almost any little thing is frequently a very gratifying compliment indeed. There may possibly in no one instance be a solid return for all these services. You may fancy that you are coldly thanked, and that your courtesy has been churlishly received. But do not, as the vulgar do, grumble over it, to yourself or to others. Remember that you have at least exercised your heart and your manners. Persevere in your attentions to every one, and you will soon find the reward *in yourself*. Remember the Arab proverb "do good and throw it into the sea. If the fishes do not observe it God will."

By remembering all the instances of true politeness, devoid of a desire to *display*, which fall under your notice, and by applying them, you will soon become graceful in manner if not in body. The one however leads to the other. Begin by strictly observing all the little courtesies of thanks, salutations, offering places, handing chairs, paying deserved com-

pliments, and in fact by rendering all services and attentions to all people at all times, which are proper and fit. Do not neglect anything of the kind, even to a person for whom you care very little, nor say to yourself: "he will never know it if I neglect it." Be up and acting. It is a great step towards politeness, grace and skill in conversation, to have formed habits of generosity and constant courtesy.

If you have an enemy, and an opportunity occurs to benefit him in matters great or small, act like a *gentleman*, and do him good service without hesitation. If you would know what it is to feel noble, and "strong within yourself," do this secretly and keep it secret. Though you have no higher motive, carry out the principle for the sake of pride and dignity. A man who can act thus will soon feel at ease anywhere. It is said of Callot, an eminent French artist and engraver of the seventeenth century, that he was once slandered in a pasquinade by a certain nobleman of the court. At that time, to have one's portrait engraved by Callot was an object of ambition with the highest dignitaries of the kingdom, and it was attained by very few. Callot's answer to the injury was to publish a superbly execut-

ed likeness of his enemy, with an inscription setting forth his titles and great deeds. To this day the incident is cited as an instance of proud nobility of soul. Callot was in the highest sense polite.

Politeness is shown by passing over the faults and foibles of those whom you meet. Cultivate this especially towards relations. The world is severe in its judgment of those who expose the faults of kindred, no matter what the provocation may be. Vulgar families are almost always at feud. It is not polite to detail injuries which you may have received from any one, unless there exist some *urgent* necessity for so doing.

Politeness is manifested in courteous inquiries after the friends and family of those whom you meet, and in manifesting a cordial interest in them. It is shown by devoting a little space in every letter to "remembrances" for friends. It is a highly gratifying form of politeness to write occasionally to all from whom you have received kindnesses which will warrant you in so doing. It is polite to conform your dress, and (in reason) your habits, to the tastes and feeling of those whose guest or associate you may be. It is polite and complimentary to inquire after any one of whose acquaintance your friend may

have reason to be proud. It is polite when you are a guest to endeavor to enjoy yourself and make others do so. It is polite to those who are assembled in any place, to avoid heated argument, and all noisy remarks or "remarkable" conduct. It is polite to promptly ask every one to take a chair who enters your house or office, and the more cultivated you are, the more widely will you extend such courtesies to humble people. It is polite to do everything for another which would gratify him or her and is not unreasonable. It is polite to make no allusions to age. It is polite to spare people elder than yourself, and women of any age, any exertion of personal effort, even in the merest trifles. It is polite to take no notice whatever of accidents or annoying occurrences, unless by so doing you can be of assistance. It is polite to make ready and unstudied sacrifices of your exertion or of your comfort to gratify others; as, for instance, to always escort any lady, or do a service for a friend. It is polite to suppress your peculiar tenets in religion or politics before those who differ with you. It is polite to never take it upon yourself in any way to punish any person, unless it be distinctly your business to do so. It is polite to avoid practical jokes. It is

polite when you have offended any one or hurt his feelings in any way, to apologize for it, as clearly as possible without reservation or excuse, since the more vulgar a man is, the more does he obscure and degrade an apology by self-justification. It is polite to express an interest in or admiration of that which is dear to others. It is sometimes more polite to accept a gift or a courtesy, especially from humble people, than to refuse it; and it is polite to show the *utmost* kindness and courtesy to those who have been reduced by adversity. And it is something more than polite to interpose and shield another person from mortification, wounded self-respect and loss of dignity.

The young reader may practise the politeness which will advance him in the most elegant society, in every hut and workshop. He may show it every time he speaks to any person, and test it in every act in which another is concerned. If in addition to constant courtesy and kindness he cultivate the graces, be neat in person and attire, make a good bow, is prompt at offering a lady his arm, and become otherwise personally dexterous, he will have done much to qualify himself for that *conversation*, which, as meaning "familiar discourse and inter-

change of sentiments," must itself be entirely qualified by the nature, habits, and feelings of any one maintaining it.

I trust that if the reader who aims at this accomplishment will carefully re-read this chapter, and *thoroughly* realize the meaning and applicability of its rules, he will not accuse it of being a collection of "mere general remarks" of no practical use. Certain minor requisites popularly connected with "politeness" are indeed not to be learned from a book. To bow gracefully, to hold one's head erect, to sit properly at all times and always at ease, to walk well, to avoid clownish attitudes and many little awkward acts, *to eat properly and conduct one's self well in all respects at table*, require either familiarity with people who do all these things, or else very great perseverance. But to form, even unaided, the great basis of all elegance and politeness, is possible to all. It is a duty and should be a pleasure.

CHAPTER IX.

OF STORIES, ANECDOTES, AND PUNS, IN CONVERSATION.



T is well to be able to tell a good story, but it is better to be able to avoid the reputation of being a professed story-teller.

The same is true as regards repeating anecdotes, puns, quotations, and other illustrations of a more formal style of wit or of sentiment than conversation usually affords. He who aims at conversing well, must avoid a hobby.

Yet in limiting your stories to one or two, while in the same party, as high authority advises, I do not counsel the continual repetition of only one or two stories. It is very disagreeable to be expected

to laugh at something which one has heard before, and the man who is known by repeating a small budget of the same tales to all his friends, is invariably more or less imbecile. What shall I say of men who learn *one* story of a professor of elocution, who practise it frequently at home, and repeat it for years on every occasion!

Do not tell a story unless you think it new, or are at least confident that it will be new to your auditors. Let it be *in place* — that is to say, illustrative of something which has occurred in conversation, for a story forced in at all hazards is very ridiculous. Of such awkward introductions the jest books contain the following illustrations:

“An old gentleman had a story of a gun, which he was wont to tell every day at dinner. As it was sometimes difficult to find an opportunity to introduce it, he hit upon the following unfailing expedient. Stamping on the ground beneath the table, he would exclaim:

“‘Bless me! what’s that? — a gun? By the way, talking of *guns* —’

“And then he told his story.”

There is also an instance of one who, in company with a celebrated theologian, thought it necessary to

display some Biblical knowledge, but could not, for a long time think of anything which seemed apt. At last, at a very unfit time, he cried out :

"I do declare that Samson was the strongest man that ever lived."

"Not so," exclaimed one present. "You yourself are stronger than Samson."

"How so?" asked the other, in amazement.

"Why, have you not just lugged him in by the head and shoulders?"

The jest was rude and therefore not to be commended. In telling stories, study brevity, and good, clear English, avoiding all "fine language," and yet omitting nothing which can render them perfectly intelligible. If you can tell them without laughing yourself, the effect is generally thought to be thereby improved.* The best story-tellers seldom mimic the voice or accent, as it savors of buffoonery and vulgarity, unless a foreigner be described, and even

* CHARLES LAMB, in his *Essays of Elia*, (Edition of Philadelphia, 1859, p. 489,) declares the axiom "that a man must not laugh at his own joke," to be a popular fallacy, and "the severest exaction surely ever invented upon the self-denial of poor human nature." "This is," he continues, "to expect a gentleman to give a treat without partaking of it; to sit esurient at his own table, and commend the flavour of his venison upon the absurd strength of his never touching it himself."

in such a case, good taste shows itself by avoiding exaggeration.

Never vamp up an old story with new dates and faces. It is a species of falsehood, and will subject you to contempt when detected — as you certainly will be. I have heard one who would be indignant at being called other than a gentleman, tell a story hundreds of years old, as having occurred within his own experience, and to his neighbors. What is to be thought of a man who would risk his character for veracity and honor for the sake of a jest?

An effort at dramatic *acting* in story telling is to be avoided, since it not only leads to "over-acting," but conveys an unpleasant impression of self-consciousness of humor. I do not refer in this to any truly natural effusion of merriment, such as many natives of Continental Europe display in narration, but to the manifest effort at effect which results from vanity.

There are men who are always the heroes of their own stories, and others who will fondly ask: "Did you hear that little thing I got off the other day?" Some will modestly preface a jest by informing you that it is their own, but perhaps you have already heard it, as it is all over the town? Others will in-

cidentally give themselves a touch of gilding by casually mentioning the name of some eminent man or woman who was much delighted with their wit, while certain persons humbly angle for a little praise by inquiring if it be not good enough to *print*?

Many who would not be guilty of an "immoral" thought, do not hesitate to tell *coarse* stories and utter rank jests. As such wit or humor invariably indicates *vulgarity*, either inherent or acquired, I cannot too strongly warn the young reader who would converse well, against even listening to such stuff, lest his mind should acquire a taint. Uncleanliness in any form, unpleasant details of personal neglect, anecdotes founded on the secrets or the articles of the toilette, instances of gross appetite, or indeed of any sensual excesses; of being disgusted, and incidents of ill-health, are all utterly unfit subjects for pleasantry, and should never be used as such. No prefacing or apology can render them excusable, or remove the stain of nastiness from the mind which entertains them. It is worth remarking, that while the merely "witty and wicked" jest generally flits away into forgetfulness, the *coarse* joke remains to be too often permanently fixed in the memory. But young minds which are contaminated

with coarseness are the readiest receptacles for all vice. It is not at all unusual to hear, in rural districts, even pious men, of the ruder class, who would not for the world make the faintest allusion to anything savoring of "immorality," still indulge in many varieties of verbal filth which would cause some of the wickedest worldlings of the cities to feel unpleasantly. Those who have carefully studied children's minds, will agree with me when I attribute the development of much of that impropriety which after (and sometimes before) the age of puberty, results in vice; not to inherent appetite, but rather to familiarity with the coarseness disguised as humor, which is never reprobated as wicked, though it may be frequently reprov'd as "vulgar."

Let the reader rely upon it, there is nothing manly or spirited in any manifestation of coarseness whatever, and that all vulgar wit and humor simply excites the silent contempt of the well-bred man or woman of the world

Anecdotes should by all means be new; old ones are little insults. A French author has said that we should be very economical in using even the best, as they form a sort of small change, of which a man

of wit and taste will avail himself only on very great occasions. A good anecdote, aptly told, is, however, a powerful aid in conversation; serving, it may be, for a very brilliant illustration. A man who never tells an anecdote is generally dull; one who does little else in conversation is frequently described as being in his anecdote.

I do not agree with a writer on conversation* who exhorts his readers to invariably attribute the paternity of puns and conundrums to some other person, adding, "if they have a success in the world, you can always reclaim them. But it certainly is not necessary, neither is it in good taste, to begin or end by informing the hearers that such an elaborate effort of wit, as a pun often *seems* to be, is your own. Depend upon it, that if you originate many plays upon words, you will acquire quite as much reputation as a punster as any man need desire, though you conceal your share in them with the most scrupulous care. Genial humor or brilliant wit, far from injuring real dignity in the eyes of cultivated people, increase it; but there is something petty in the continual torture of language for the sake of

* St. Meurice.

extracting forced resemblances, which is generally well understood, and indicates the cause why the professional punster is never spoken of, as such, with much respect. It has been thought that as people in the olden time *hired* their cap-and-bell punsters, while modern society gets its own for nothing, that they are on the increase; but there is certainly no corresponding increase in the degree of respect which they elicit.

Good puns are, however, not to be despised. They may point a moral, illustrate a character, and give force and elegance to a compliment. A pun on the incident of the day may have a vast influence, and pass into history as a curious fact. When Charles the Fifth boasted that he could put Paris into his glove (alluding to Ghent, or Gand, which was pronounced like *gant*, a glove), he made, it is true, a poor pun, but illustrated, with characteristic force, not only his power, but also the prosperity of Flanders.

It is well to learn from jest-books and other sources, what puns and facetious anecdotes are already current in the world. If the reader has any aptitude whatever for such matters, he will thus

be soon sufficiently well-informed to be on his guard against those who would impose on him the shoddy of wit for its broadcloth. "Every man," says a writer, "ought to read the jest-books, that he may not make himself disagreeable by repeating 'old Joes' as the very last good thing"

CHAPTER X.

OF QUESTIONING. ITS MISAPPLICATION, AND ITS ADVANTAGES IN
CONVERSATION.



EVER ask a question to which a reluctant answer may be anticipated.

I do not here refer to questions put to satisfy prying curiosity, but rather to a form in which some persons shape much of their conversation. The habit is one which incessantly involves those who are questioned, in difficulties. Instead of remarking that the weather is fine, the questioner asks if the weather be not fine? which can be answered only with a commonplace affirmative. Without meaning it, he either puts another in the position of one unable to say any-

thing, or compels an unusual amount of thought and evasion.

The questioner asks at a party, "What do you think of Miss A's dress?" thereby casting all the responsibility of saying anything unfavorable on the other, or at least safely leading him, or her, into the temptation. Many show a great, but not creditable, ingenuity, in employing questions in such a manner as to make others appear to discredit, and yet seem very little in the wrong themselves. If there be a manifest unwillingness to answer the query, the one putting it will smile significantly, and say: "Oh—I see;" or, "Ah!—a friend?—I beg pardon." Women of a certain grade of vulgarity seem to think this form of speech very arch, and shrewd, or "cunning," and employ it freely. It is, in fact, a species of "teasing," and is resorted to as giving the querist a position of ease and superiority.*

Most of my readers have met, or will meet, persons who once or oftener in a conversation inquire, vaguely: "What do you think of A., or B.?" ex-

* MR. CHARLES DICKENS has in the character of "Rosa Dartle," in his novel *David Copperfield*, set forth, with great skill, many of the annoying traits of the habitual questioner in conversation

pecting no news, but hoping for a display of weakness or dislike on your part. Such persons are the serpents of society. It is an *art* to evade them, and with them all impertinent, meddling, and foolish questions. The self-possessed conversationalist will, however, find it an easy matter to answer with a calm, steady, prolonged gaze, before entering a polite demurrer against being thus witness-boxed.

Questioning may, however, at times be made a medium of true kindness and courtesy. People are often willing, nay, anxious to communicate information, but are unable to do so unless adroitly questioned. A modest man, who will not speak of his own exploits, may be induced to impart much that is interesting, and he will frequently, and perhaps very properly, think he has been entertaining others, and conversing in a highly creditable manner.

It is necessary to learn the art of asking questions skilfully, but it should not be forgotten that they ought, in most cases, to be prefaced with an excuse or some slight apology.

CHAPTER XI

TAKING LIBERTIES. IMPUDENCE. STARING.



HOSE whose conversation is inspired by courtesy and refined by culture, are the last to indulge in the violations of etiquette known as taking liberties.

There are circles, and those not entirely among the so-called vulgar, where liberties are continually taken, and where there is even an impression that social intercourse without them would be dull and spiritless. This belief is encouraged by axioms to the effect that "there is nothing like a little impudence to succeed with the women," "nothing venture nothing have," "brass is better than gold," and nothing is given without asking."

The practical meaning of it all is that the modesty of others may be invaded, and the ordinary observances of society freely violated, whenever it suits the pleasure of any one to do so, especially if he can by tact or luck escape punishment.

Let the young reader determine from the beginning that anything which is to be obtained by impudence may be secured to much greater advantage by modesty, or at least by a careful observance of all the forms of good breeding, and by respect. Firmness and confidence, enterprize and boldness itself, have nothing in common with impudence, and the most daring deeds are best accomplished when the most scrupulous regard to the feelings of others which circumstances permit, is observed.

There are men who cannot take a seat in a public vehicle, who cannot give an order at a hotel table, in a word who can do nothing while observed by others, without displaying the miserable vanity of impudence. They ask the simplest questions with the air of "confidence men," and read a newspaper with a pitiable expression of conceit and insolence. They are quick to take offence, for they are aware that they are frequently observed and understood by their superiors

in good breeding, even among those whom they treat as inferiors, and the consciousness makes them irritable. To remedy this they take liberties and defy the consequences.

A very common form of vulgar impudence is the staring at ladies. To do so in any public place is ungentlemanly, but to avail oneself of a vicinity which circumstances render unavoidable, is contemptible. The man who will stare continually at a lady across a *hôtel-table*, or in an omnibus, deserves to be arrested. Ignorant young men frequently do this under the impression that it is not really disagreeable to the other sex and that they are in fact paying a species of compliment. Could they know the vexation and annoyance which is often masked under the air of calmness with which their insolence is received, they would think differently. I have heard at a hotel, of instances in which ladies delayed their meals for hours; subjected themselves to many annoyances and even left the house in order to avoid the presence of some conceited puppy who possibly imagined that he was recommending himself to their good graces.

I have known a man who moved "in the first cir-

cles," to intrude into a private opera-box and take a front seat accidentally left vacant, which he was permitted to retain, since each of the two parties in the box supposed he was a friend of the other, when in fact none of them were acquainted with the fellow. It is difficult to comprehend that the temporary advantage derived from such conduct could counterbalance the permanent contempt excited when the full nature of his impudence was finally understood by all. Yet a liberty of this nature is of the kind which many persons regard as rather funny and pardonable.

Never infringe on any properly established regulation be it what it may. A young lady may be as dashing a Di Vernon as ever lived, and a girl of the utmost spirit, originality and independence, without plucking flowers in public places where it is forbidden, or asking questions which she knows will be reluctantly answered, or intruding where she is not wanted, and young men may in corresponding manner behave themselves with all regard to the feelings of other people without incurring the slightest suspicion of "slowness."

Always discourage forwardness in others and be

reluctant to grant favors or patronage to impudent people. For all *creditable* employments they are less fitted than the well bred and firm, while their honesty is always questionable. Insolence is of itself a lack of conscience as regards the rights of others

CHAPTER XII.

OF ARGUMENT IN CONVERSATION. OF MEN WHO ARE "ALWAYS
IN THE RIGHT."



CARNEST argument should be avoided in society or before a third person. To prove yourself in the right is to show that another is in the wrong. It is ill-bred to do this before witnesses, and it is courteous to avoid it, so far as is possible, at any time.

Men are much more given to "argument" than women, and are far less sensible of its absurdity. It is well to reason with oneself as much as possible, but little, beyond a display of vanity, is gained in debating a point with another.

For a man or woman of intellect to seriously ar-

gue a point with one of inferior mind, experience, or culture, is ridiculous.

If you are known to hold firmly established views on any subject, beware of conversing much on it, except with those who perfectly agree with you. You will not aid your cause or yourself by *disputing* over it. If you are boldly attacked, respectable people will give you much more credit for gracefully evading a strife of opinions, than for entering upon it. *Ladies* who have a true claim to the name, invariably appreciate and admire such conduct in a man. Much more skill and sagacity may be shown in refusing to argue, than in so doing; the one who seeks to escape having the great advantage of being able to make his adversary appear determined to be disagreeable and discourteous.

The inconvenience of having a guest given to argument, and one who continually proves himself to be in the right, is well illustrated by a French story which I translate, and which may serve as a lesson for all conceited and disputative men.

"The author of the poem *Des Saisons* — The Seasons — the Marquis de Saint Lambert, introduced one day to the celebrated Madame Geoffrin, who assembled at her house the first men of letters

of her time, an estimable man of learning, known by many excellent works which he had written on political economy.

“Madame Geoffrin received him kindly,—as she did every one,—and then the recommendation of the Marquis de Saint Lambert was, with her, of great influence.

“For three months the poet’s protégé never failed to be present at the lady’s receptions, and no one complained of his company, since he was a man, not only of learning, but of taste. One day, however, when about to enter, a servant stopped him at the door, and said with great gravity :

“ ‘Madame cannot see you to-day.’

“ ‘How — she is gone out? But I see Monsieur Morellet enter — and Monsieur Thomas. Why, there is the Abbé Delille, humming an air at the window. — Ha! good day, Monsieur l’Abbé! How is our dear lady to-day? I’m sure she’s at home.’

“ ‘Madame, sir, cannot see you.’

“ ‘But is she ill, then? Of course not, since I hear Diderot’s loud laugh, and if Madame Geoffrin were not in health —’

“ ‘Sir, I beg your pardon a thousand times, but I have simply to say that madame *cannot see you.*’

"This argument was irresistible, and the author bowed to the servant — for a true philosopher is polite to every one — and went next day to his patron, to tell him of the event of yesterday.

"He could make nothing of his strange reception. Had he committed some blunder? Had he permitted himself to say something indiscreet or inconvenient? The author endeavored, but in vain, to show that he had been in the wrong, in order to prove that Madame Geoffrin was in the right. Saint Lambert listened to the end, and only interrupted the eloquent pleading with the words, 'you are in the right, my friend; a thousand times in the right.' When he had concluded, Saint Lambert took from the chimney-piece a letter, of which he broke the seal, and presented it to his protégé, inviting him to read it. The latter urged a few scruples, but finally opened the letter. It was signed by Madame Geoffrin, and, addressed to the Marquis de Saint Lambert, contained the following lines:

"'I close my door, my dear marquis, on your learned M. B——; should I see him often, I should be vexed to death; and, thank heaven, I am still a little attached to life, thanks to your friendship and to that of a few of the faithful who resemble you.

Your M. B—— is, in short, intolerable — *he is always in the right!*’

“These few words at once explained every thing to the learned man, and Saint Lambert, as we are assured, gave him a long lecture on the danger of being always in the right, and on the necessity of being sometimes in the wrong. A man who never risks a mere opinion, who always bases himself on a logical foundation, on reason, and truth, must be very annoying.

“The learned author at once changed his system of tactics, and soon re-entered the good graces of Madame Geoffrin. M. B—— kept his word. He became one of the most amusing men of the circle whence he had been exiled; and his conversation, bristling with paradoxes and odd caprices of wit and humor, ensured him many successes. He became one of the most perfect men of the world of his time, without in the least losing his reputation as a political economist.”

In France the manifestation of a fixed determination to argue, is very properly regarded as rude. Even in inferior society we may hear uttered, as a reproach: “*Tiens! — il veut avoir du raison!*” “Ah! he wishes to prove himself to be in the

right!" Those who have seen a whole dinner-party made uncomfortable by two desperate debaters; or who have heard, in a party, voices loud in dispute, while the hostess, seriously annoyed or grieved, almost struggled with tears at the interruption to the harmony of the meeting; will agree with me that argument in society is indeed misplaced. It is wrong to be always in the right.

CHAPTER XIII.

OF THE INFLUENCE OF WOMEN ON CONVERSATION. MARRIED
LADIES



THE most celebrated groups of genius which the world has ever seen, may have consisted exclusively of men, but they have always been formed around a woman.

From the days when all the intellect of Greece gathered about Aspasia, down to the French salons of the last century, each with its beautiful or witty *coryphæa*, or centre of the chorus, we find that when conversation has at any period been raised to a high degree of culture, and exerted a decided influence on the spirit of the age, it has owed its development in a great degree to women.

The ability displayed by Dr. Johnson and Oliver Goldsmith in conversation was due to their own genius, but their many defects of rudeness, or of eccentricity, may be fairly attributed to a want of familiarity in early life with women of culture and refinement. The best part of Lord Chesterfield's wit and polish, was derived as he himself tells us, from assiduously frequenting the society of ladies.

Every well educated, amiable and witty woman who has fully acquired "the art of society," has it in her power to exercise, in connection with hospitality, a very great influence on the world around her, and to do much good. It is not enough for the scholar, the artist, and others of retired habits to meet with friends among women — they also require intercourse with cultivated society where they may rub off the rust of retirement, and realize with pleasure that they are really in the world, and of it. When drawn together around an accomplished hostess their thoughts are more readily refined, and the rough diamonds of their knowledge are cut and polished into the most attractive forms.

Such women intuitively comprehend their mission, and recognize that its chief duty is to be agreeable to *all*, and to elicit from each a display of his

best qualities. They are consequently courteous and attentive to all who are presented to them. The young collegian or clerk, the retiring youth who has seldom attracted notice from other women, is often astonished and gratified to find himself an object of kind interest to some far-famed belle or brilliant lady-leader of society, whom he had supposed far too elevated by adulation to bestow on him more than ordinary civilities. He does not know that it is her pride to make something graceful out of such raw material as his mind presents, and that the more a woman is elevated by her own abilities, the more widely do her rays shine on all.

It is under the auspices of such women that conversation; the art which of all others conduces to make social intercourse agreeable; is most perfectly developed. The beneficial influence which they exert is in consequence incalculable. The eminent statesman, the great clergyman, the celebrated poet, may imagine that the evenings spent in chatting with an accomplished lady and her friends have been passed in mere amusement, but they are mistaken. Genial influences are the most conducive to fresh exertions of genius. Original ideas are more rapidly developed in the summer of cultivated society than in the winter of solitude.

It is a duty which every one owes to himself to seek the society of such women, nor is it less the duty of every lady who is conscious of possessing ability, to exert it so as to assemble those who may be thereby benefitted. Let her endeavor by reading, to qualify herself to converse intelligently with every one, and banish from her manner all vanity, and every tendency to say anything disagreeable, so that only pleasant impressions may be left in all. If she do this successfully, she may rest assured that she does not live in vain.

It is to be regretted that in England and in America "the world" seems to think that refined social intercourse can only exist when favored by wealth. To pass an evening pleasantly there must be, for many, a supper, expensive dresses, and the costly preparations which give a festival air to such assemblages. Many women who are personally in every way well qualified to do incalculable good, exclude themselves, in consequence of limited means, from society, and confine their influences to the domestic circle. The result is that ladies when married, and when their minds are expanding in culture and experience, find themselves too frequently shut out from their proper sphere, while mere boys and miss-

es, in certain circles, constitute and control society ! Intellect is transferred from the head to the heels, and when we ask what is discussed at parties, the appropriate answer would be, "people dance."

This will be remedied, and conversation will become what it should, when the silly spirit of ostentation is subdued, and people learn that it is possible to receive friends without turning their homes into restaurants. A lady who receives company has enough to do in attending to her guests, and in promoting conversation among them, without the additional anxiety lest a supper be well served, and lest servants should blunder. Our American married ladies complain, and justly, that they lose social influence when they gain the wedding ring, but it is in their own power to remedy the evil. Let them receive their friends freely without feeding them. In our large cities, receptions without "refreshments," or with very little, are already doing much good, but through the country the old-fashioned ideas of "parties" and what they should be, are still prevalent.

Young men for their part should remember that excellence in conversation, and refined manners, are most readily acquired by the "temperate," and that the man is to be pitied who cannot enjoy social in-

tercourse without eating and drinking. He who would influence others, must not himself be influenced by appetite. The lowest orders, it is true, cannot imagine a cheerful assembly without the attractions of the table, and this reflection should induce all who aim at intellectual culture to endeavor to avoid placing the choicest phases of social life on such a basis.

It is almost needless to advise young men to cultivate the society of ladies. This counsel is every where given. But the reader should remember that, to use a French expression, "there are women and women," or, that there are very great differences in "the sex." A young woman who never cultivates her mind, whose reading is confined to second-rate novels, whose conversation runs principally on other people's affairs, and whose remarks have for the most part a tone of jeering flippancy and depreciation may be a subject for occasional amusement, but is utterly unfit to be a friend or companion to any rational man, and least of all to a man who is steadily determined to improve in every way his heart and intellect, and to rise in the world. Fortunately it is seldom needful to choose between such female friends or none. He who reads much, who expresses him-

self well, and who talks no scandal, will, if he make every effort, soon find congenial society.

Conversation with intelligent married ladies of any age, who have seen much of the world, is therefore to be strongly commended to all who would improve their minds and manners. To gain a good wife one should study good wives. "He who would the daughter win," says an excellent proverb, "must with the mother first begin." By beginning in social intercourse from above instead of from below, one is far more likely to meet with young ladies who are really worth knowing, than if he devote his leisure hours to idle chat with girls who take no interest in any object of real intellectual value.

CHAPTER XIV.

OF DISAGREEABLE SUBJECTS IN CONVERSATION.



THE reader will frequently be reminded in society of the remark, attributed I believe to Dr. Samuel Johnson, that "nice persons have frequently nasty ideas." I do not refer to immoral or indecent, but to *disagreeable* subjects, or at least to such as it is well to avoid if possible.

To be scrupulously cleanly in every respect should, with a well bred man, be so much a matter of habit as to seldom occupy his thoughts when not engaged in its duties. But there are people so self conscious of their neatness as to make a constant parade of their customs in this respect. They will talk in any

society of the details of their toilette, and descant on the advantages to be derived from cold water as though it were a new invention. Others are fond of discussing their own ailings, and will describe a dyspepsia or liver-complaint at any time to almost any body. Some will enter upon such unpleasant personal details with an apology, while others with still greater caution contrive under the guise of an excuse for not fulfilling an engagement, to give the full particulars of the maladies which prevented attendance.

Can it really interest any one to know that a person has an excellent or an indifferent appetite, and does it never occur to others that it is seldom agreeable to a guest to be informed before company that he is eating very little? Is it less polite than it would be to exclaim, "why, how much you are eating!" When a lady carefully informs all present that she seldom requires much food, does it suggest to those who are even slightly acquainted with physiology, any agreeable associations, and does it prove anything except that she neglects to exercise and to otherwise take proper care of her health?

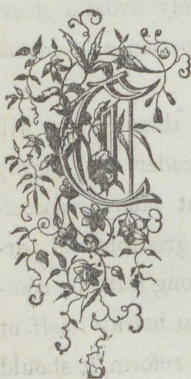
We all know that dental operations, the sufferings endured from tight boots, the offensive conduct of

bad servants, children's teething, the effects of medicines, casualties and deaths, must not only occur, but also be more or less discussed. But many people who are by no means absurdly fastidious naturally avoid all such subjects of annoyance in conversation, while others, in proportion to the vulgarity of their minds, introduce them and dwell upon them. There is of course nothing so easy as to prove the necessity of talking on such matters, but it is very certain that refined people instinctively avoid a grievance, or a personal detail, and experience no inconvenience from so doing.

I trust that the hints given in this chapter will be borne in mind by the young reader not merely "in society," but among his most familiar associates. The habit of talking on disagreeable and personal topics is generally formed among intimate companions, and when formed is apt to betray itself at all times. As with all subjects for reform, it should be attended to in the root, and not in the branches.

CHAPTER XV

THE PARADOX IN CONVERSATION.



COMMON-PLACE, steady men, talking among themselves, may be very well amused with "regular stories," perhaps with long ones, and with old-fashioned jokes. But with women, and volatile men of the world, such formal fun finds little favor. Again, an anecdote which would set the table in a roar at the Club, will be but indifferently received at a "reception," even though whispered to dames who are anything but prudes, and though the jest in itself be anything but improper.

"Why is this?" Has the reader never observed that women who enjoy humor such as pleases men,

invariably resemble men in other respects, as regards habits of thought? Let him therefore think twice before he ventures to offer to ladies the same fun which has already had a brilliant success among his male friends.

Compliments in a witty or droll form are, as I have said, always acceptable to every one. A paradox is also almost invariably sure to at least pass as worth hearing. It is something which, while contrary to received opinion, or *seemingly* absurd, is true in fact, and of a truth which is at once felt by all to whom it is addressed. To say, for instance, of a lady's face in a picture gallery, that it represents either the ugliest of all the beauties, or the most charming of all the plain women, is a paradox which may contain much truth relative to the character of one of those peculiar countenances which attract us; we know not why. It is a paradox to say that nothing lies so much as facts, unless it be figures, since these, while acknowledged to be the most accurate means of presenting truths, are also very extensively used in reports to falsify them. "There is no fool like a wise fool," "Men who are willing to die in the last ditch for their country, are generally careful to avoid the first," are all tolerable paradoxes.

Sometimes a paradox occurs in the form of an answer. "Did you ever see such a diamond?" inquired a lady, referring to an enormous imitation brilliant in a jeweller's window. "Not since I visited a glass-factory," was the reply. "I can read you like a book," said an illiterate person, rudely to a girl. "I should think so," she quietly replied.

The paradox is easily cultivated, and when made on a topic of any importance, is not unfrequently very suggestive of sound reflections. The mind may be trained to form it as readily as the pun; but it has this great advantage over the latter, that it may involve almost any *thought* whatever, while the pun is a mere play upon words and sound.

The paradox is not an element of first class importance in conversation. It should not be very frequently repeated, and it cannot be sustained for any length of time, save in humorous argument. But it should be cultivated as a means of presenting, in a spirited form, thoughts which would otherwise sound very commonplace.

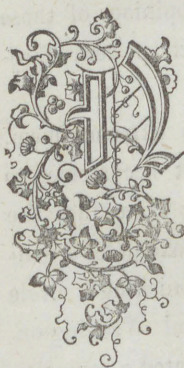
There are those, however, who abuse this form of thought and of expression; as, for instance, men who, having satisfied themselves by much special

study and research that some generally received opinion is false, or that some popular idol had his secret faults, frequently, in mixed society, startle and confound people of very ordinary attainments, with their novel views. When the paradox in this form is launched at a person of equal ability, no objection can be raised, save the proviso that there shall be no heated argument, unbecoming general society. But it is unkind and cowardly to unsettle or demolish the perfectly harmless faith or opinions of those who are inadequately provided with powers of repartee.

The urging of paradoxes in this extreme form, especially among those who are not accustomed to them, not unfrequently fails entirely to produce the effect anticipated. I may quote, for example, a gentleman who spent an evening in astonishing a circle of young ladies by abusing General Washington. He flattered himself that he had created a sensation — the only result was a very natural suspicion as to his sanity

CHAPTER XVI.

OF SELFISHNESS IN TRIFLES. SMALL SACRIFICES.



O MAN can go well through the world, succeed in society, or become an adept in conversation, unless he learn to sacrifice selfishness in many little things to the comfort of others.

It is true that accomplished men of the world are often intensely selfish beings. But they have the shrewd tact to yield in trifles, while some of the most generous people will, through mere inertness and *moral laziness*, never think of giving up or making way, for the convenience of others.

With many women — not *all* — great acts of generosity, and noble deeds are regarded as obvious du-

ties, while little sacrifices and trivial courtesies have that sweetest of aromas — the incense of voluntary active homage. Hence it comes that men who are known to be cruel, unprincipled, depraved and heartless, are often greatly liked by “very nice” girls — to the great astonishment of male friends who, having exposed the character of “the villain,” expect to see him at once detested. These excellent persons do not know that to superficial women, whatever their moral education may have been, great virtues are always a little below the heroic standard in value, while small virtues are very great. It is the old story of the two sexes — the one dealing only in large notes and paying heavy bills, so that he expects every one to recognize the value of money, and the other familiar with nothing but the constant rattle of small change.

But however good and virtuous and great a man may be, he is very far from being excused on that account from making every effort to excel in little virtues, and in those small sacrifices of comfort which are really offered to urbanity. If bad men make themselves attractive, good men should beat them at their own weapons, and there is no reason why they should not. The world is rapidly

losing all its respect for that ungainly and uncouth Puritanism which in its excess of zeal for grace, lost all sight of the graces. No degree of moral purity can afford the slightest excuse for a man's feeding to gross excess at a table, displaying meanwhile in his conversation little save conceited boorishness, snubbing his hostess at intervals, insulting his fellow guests in the style of Dr. Johnson and other eminent Englishmen, and finally rolling off to an easy chair to ruminate at leisure until the hour arrived to deliver his evening discourse. Yet such is the picture which is drawn of one of the most popular English preachers of the present day, and it would apply to many others of less note. Such examples have the worst possible effect on the young who are shrewd enough to feel that there is, and should be, a connection between refinement, courtesy, and all *true* goodness, and that selfishness and boorishness are as wicked in their ultimate effects on others, as the breaking any precept in the Decalogue.

The man of talent, far from being excused from cultivating courtesy and small unselfish traits, is the very one who should lead in such accomplishments. In the first place, as I have already intimated, all ability is most perfectly matured and developed by

intercourse with society. And in the second place, the man of great intellectual power is the one of all others who should excel in making himself and those whom he may meet, mutually agreeable. Some of the most brilliant men who ever trod the floor of a parlor, have been "mere scholars," and members of a class which is habitually spoken of among those who are ignorant of its highest types as "pedantic" and ignorant of the world.

One of the most agreeable of small sacrifices which can be made at an evening party, for the sake of the hostess and for the promotion of gayety, is to distribute the conversation. It is doubtless very comfortable to get into a quiet corner with a brilliant beauty, or "a lady-comrade of established liking," and flirt or laugh away with her till supper time. But if one does so, all must — with somebody. Hence the establishment of "barricades" — those settled groups, which cannot be broken up, and which are the horror of all who detest a stiff party. They gather chair by chair till the whole room becomes impenetrable, and any person who is in the charmed circle is to you as "unattainable as the stars." In such a fixed condition appeal to the friend with whom you are conversing, or call your

hostess to counsel, and you will soon thaw the frozen stream. No lady who knows much of society will think that weariness of her conversation induces a gentleman who knows his duties to the world, to take leave of her after a prolonged interview, nor will any gentleman suffer his vanity to be piqued should she manifest a willingness to converse with others.

If you have very few acquaintances, make others. This may be readily done by exercising a little tact. It is well to ascertain who are present, from some friend; the doing so will afford an opportunity to intimate that some one of them interests you, in which case courtesy will suggest an introduction. It is needless to say that when it devolves on you to make strangers acquainted, you should exercise some discretion, and ascertain, or at least consider, whether it would be mutually agreeable. Those who introduce much are good Samaritans in society, those who do so injudiciously are marauders who rush upon travelers and bind them captive, two by two.

If you know anything of music, you may properly enough ask for an introduction to any lady who has favored those present with a vocal or instrumental performance. Few singers are sorry to learn that they have made an impression. If there be a man

or woman of celebrity, present, it will be but natural for you to desire an acquaintance. If you are in any degree intimate with your entertainer, you would show a kindness which will be appreciated, by intimating a desire to be introduced to any present; especially to any ladies; who seem to be silent and neglected. In the social garden wall-flowers are weeds, but like many weeds they only require a little culture to take place with the choicer blooms.

If you are invited to pass an evening at any place never be one of those who are absent on account of unfavorable weather. Then, if ever, you should make every exertion to fulfil the promise given in your acceptance. A sacrifice of this nature is always appreciated. If your circumstances be moderate, and it should be the occasion of expense which you can ill afford, regard it as a debt of honor which must be paid, and save it out of some other expenditure. Remember that in any case it will not have cost you so much as it will the lady or gentleman to whose kindness you owe the invitation.

CHAPTER XVII.

OF CONVERSATION AT DINNER-PARTIES,



WHEN guests are strangers to each other, a dinner-party is the severest test as to the ability possessed by each to converse well.

Sometimes we may know from the character of the host or hostess, or of "the house," that of those who assemble there. It may be "ultra-fashionable," "moderately fashionable," or "rather fashionable." It may be "extremely conservative," "highly respectable, or "very respectable," and again it may be one of the numerous crosses of two or more of these. It may be based on rising wealth with new affiliations through

the younger branches, or by marriage, to the respectable and fashionable, and it may consist of nice, quiet people, forming a sort of unknown island, which maintains very little communication with the great continent of society. It may be diplomatic, or only political, and it may be sectarian. The lady of the house may have been deeply steeped in Parisian French, while her husband is as decidedly immersed in Pennsylvania German. It may be the party of a rising young professional man, or that of one who is firmly established in the world; or of a real estate auctioneer, or prominent editor; or it may be military, or naval, or rural.

If you know thus much of your entertainer, you may probably conjecture something as to the general character of those whom you are invited to meet. Of one thing you may be certain, that the more highly cultivated the guests, and the more decided their cosmopolitanism, the easier will be the intercourse, and the less apparent any want of previous acquaintance among them. There is a freemasonry among men and women of the world which renders a dull dinner impossible. Much tact is often displayed by the entertainer in seating together persons